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What are the Important Elements of the Pre-Primary Curriculum? : The Views of Parents and Teachers

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**WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS
OF THE PRE-PRIMARY
CURRICULUM?
-THE VIEWS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS.**

By

Ann Hyde BEd(Hons)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Award of

Bachelor of Education (Honours)

at the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences,
Edith Cowan University.

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ABSTRACT

The delivery of pre-primary education in Western Australia has undergone dramatic and rapid change since its tentative beginnings in 1911. During the 1990's we have seen the most tumultuous period of change with the implementation of the government's Good Start Program. It is timely that we investigate what the primary stakeholders expect from pre-primary programs. Are parents and teachers expecting the same things? Is there harmony between the curriculum of the home and the school? This study addressed these questions.


A survey was conducted, involving 150 parents and 60 teachers (30 pre-primary teachers and 30 year one teachers). Schools were randomly selected from three school districts. The data collected were entered into the SPSS computer program. Analysis included frequency tables and graphs; coding of responses; and comparison of means using independent samples t-tests.

The results of this study identify parents as a primary source of pressure to formalise the pre-primary curriculum. Although parents appear to understand that pre-primary is a period where young children develop social, language and cognitive skills through play and problem solving, they also want children to learn to read and write. This study discusses the need for a negotiated curriculum that gives ownership to stakeholders and scaffolds what teachers and parents learn from each other about the children in their care.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature 

Date 29 - 6 - 99

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I would like to acknowledge the schools and participants involved in the study. Their responses will enhance our understanding of early childhood education in Western Australia and perhaps elsewhere. I would also like to thank Dr Loraine Corrie for her supervision. I could not have completed this without her. Thank you, Loraine.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In recent years, early childhood professionals have expressed concern about the growing emphasis on 'academics' in the pre-primary curriculum (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Dolipoulou, 1996; Elkind, 1993). In particular, early childhood specialists have noted that the primary school curriculum is being "pushed down" to the non-compulsory year of school, which is referred to here as 'pre-primary'.

Evidence suggests that the pre-primary curriculum has become more formalised (Bredekamp, 1997), but the impetus for the change is unclear. In Western Australia, anecdotal evidence suggests that some pre-primary teachers experience pressure from parents to teach literacy and numeracy skills in a formal way. In addition, teachers assert that school principals ask for the play-based curriculum to be replaced by formal 'lessons', and that year 1 teachers (the first compulsory year of primary school) expect children to have formal literacy skills before they enter their classes.

A great deal of anecdotal evidence purports to show signs of the push down curriculum, but little research has investigated the impetus for the perceived formalisation of the pre-primary curriculum, and this is the aim of the current study. In particular, this study investigates what parents and pre-primary and year 1 teachers think is important for children to learn and experience in pre-primary.

Research (Epstein, 1987; Powell, 1989; Toomey, 1989) shows that when parents and teachers collaborate they can provide learning contexts that maximise opportunities for children's growth and development. Parents and teachers construct knowledge through their interactions with others in a particular context. Teachers' interactions with parents are likely to influence parents' understandings of the early childhood program.

Parents and teachers can provide an optimal learning environment for the child when they share more than a superficial understanding of the pre-primary program. It would be easy for parents and teachers to continue to relate to the child as separate entities. In the current system of early childhood education, there may be little motivation for parents and teachers to collaborate except on a superficial level. However this may leave children in a vulnerable state, particularly when they may need to make regular transitions between the different cultures of home and school.

It is accepted widely that parents play a major part in their child's education, but without the help of a qualified teacher their input may be limited. Similarly, the best intentions of a teacher may be thwarted without the support of parents. Parents and teachers may come from different social and cultural groups, which can make collaboration difficult.

This study is based upon a 1990s definition of collaboration that adopts a social constructivist perspective, which claims that parents and teachers jointly construct knowledge about the pre-primary year. Knowledge about the pre-primary year includes the purposes of pre-primary; content of the early childhood curriculum; and the pedagogy enacted by teachers. When parents and teachers collaborate and share similar

expectations, they will transmit coherent and cohesive messages to the child, which provides continuity between 'home learning' and 'school learning'. This study identifies and compares parents' and teachers' knowledge about the pre-primary program and their ideas about the content of the pre-primary curriculum.

The setting for this study is Western Australia but the results will inform other contexts. The need for collaboration becomes acute during times of change. Currently, the field of early childhood education in Western Australia is undergoing rapid and extensive change, such as moving 4 and 5 year olds out of community centres and onto school sites. Government policy has changed the minimum entry age from four to at least four and a half years old and extended the hours children attend each week. Many of these changes were implemented with little collaboration with teachers or parents. The announcement of decisions, such as the changes to the entry age, was met with strong opposition from many parent groups. Greater collaboration and understanding of parents' and teachers' views will assist policy makers, and enable stakeholders to construct a shared purpose for pre-primary education.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in the influence parents and teachers have on the pre-primary curriculum and ultimately on the impact on the child's level of success at school. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory categorises the interactions that children have with parents and pre-primary as a 'microsystem' and the ways in which these settings interact with each other form a "mesosystem". Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the strength of relationships between microsystems will impact on the

child. For example, the child may be at risk when the perceived goals of the home and school are in conflict.

The early childhood curriculum is not static. Many different forms of early childhood programs exist between different countries and within local educational districts. The pre-primary program in any centre will fit somewhere along a continuum from a formal/academic program to a traditional/child-centred program. Many different combinations of the formal and traditional program exist. Kagan (1992) suggests that one reason for inconsistency in early childhood programs is that the meaning of educational policy will be filtered through teachers' belief systems, and the ways to implement policy constructed differently by individual teachers. Teachers may be responsible, in part, for formalising the pre-primary curriculum even when intending to implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Many researchers have criticised the growing emphasis on formal skills in the pre-primary year (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Elkind, 1993; Shepard & Smith, 1988). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) formulated guidelines to assist teachers in providing developmentally appropriate practices for young children (NAEYC, 1987). The appropriate practice guidelines clarified the best practices for early childhood programs but at the same time caused many misunderstandings. Teachers constructed their own meanings of the guidelines and implemented strategies and policies that were contrary to the intentions of the NAEYC's document. An attempt to clarify further the intentions of the original document has been made in a revised edition (Bredekamp, 1997).

The teacher's context, background, training, and personal philosophies will have a great impact on the content of the pre-primary program. However, the literature identifies other influences on the teacher that may shape the program's content. Several researchers identify parents as the source of pressure to formalise the curriculum and suggest that parents place more importance on early academic skills than teachers (Shepard & Smith, 1988; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Elkind (1986) identifies political, social and economic influences, which have put pressure on early childhood teachers to escalate the acquisition of academic skills in young children. In addition, it is said that pressure and escalating expectations originate from primary teachers and principals (Shepard & Smith, 1988).

Child-initiated and teacher-supported play is central to developmentally appropriate early childhood programs. The NAEYC stress that whilst children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, teachers are still responsible for teaching. Many recent studies have explored parents' and teachers' perceptions of play. Brewer & Kieff (1997) suggest that the type of play at home differs from the play at school and parents do not understand the value of 'school-play'. Rothlein & Brett (1987) also found that parents do not value play as a strategy in the early childhood classroom. Further studies have found that many early childhood educators also undervalue play in their classrooms (Cornelius, 1989; Rothlein & Brett, 1987).

Further analysis of parents' and teachers' expectations of the pre-primary program is necessary to identify possible areas of need for future education programs. These programs may require parents and teachers to explore their own beliefs and understandings of best practice in early childhood and to further explore these beliefs as

they relate to children in a specific context. Collaboration between teachers, parents and other early childhood professionals may be necessary in order to jointly construct an understanding of best practice in early childhood programs.

Since the 1960s, many researchers have explored the impact of parent collaboration in schools. Previously collaboration was described as ‘parent involvement’, which refers to the physical involvement of parents in schools, performing tasks such as helping out during reading and writing lessons, being on roster in pre-primaries, and covering library books. The literature supports the notion that parent and teacher collaboration, even at a superficial level leads to higher achievements for students, particularly in early childhood (McGaw, Banks & Piper, 1991; Spiegel, Fitzgerald & Cunningham, 1993; Toomey, 1989). The inference, from much of the literature, is that parents, who are unable to be physically involved in their child’s schooling, are unable to provide advantages for their child. The research into parent/teacher collaboration has not considered ways in which parents can collaborate without being physically involved. Bronfenbrenner (1986) suggests that “... events at home can affect the child’s progress in school and vice versa...” (p. 723). When home and school collaborate, similar expectations about learning and achievement are shared and cohesive messages will be sent to the child. Therefore, parents who are unable to help physically, for example because they work, are still able to initiate collaboration with teachers to generate greater achievements for students.

This study will inform policy makers about the level of cohesion between the views of parents and teachers and will indicate areas of teacher / parent education, that need to be addressed.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate what teachers and parents think children should learn and experience in the pre-primary year. To date, a thorough search of the literature indicates a paucity of research in this area. In 1985, the Education Department of Western Australia expressed a concern about the continuity between home – pre-primary – year one and identified some differences between the expectations of parents, teachers and principals. The current study addresses the issues in the 1985 report, in light of the many changes in early childhood education.

In addition, the study analyses the views of parents and teachers, in order to ascertain their expectations of the pre-primary curriculum. The study explores the perceived impetus for a formalised curriculum in pre-primary. This study will inform early childhood professionals and institutions about the future education of parents and /or teachers about developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What do parents think is important for children to learn and experience in the pre-primary year?
2. What do pre-primary and year one teachers think is important for children to learn and experience in the pre-primary year?
3. Are the views of pre-primary and year one teachers and parents different?

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are to be used within the context of this study.

The parent refers to the person/s who provide the day-to-day care of the child and may include guardians, caregivers or grandparents.

Views is a term used extensively throughout the current study and in the literature. The views of parents and teachers are defined as a person's insight, apprehension, discernment and/or comprehension which contributes to their understanding. A person's views are influenced by their socio-cultural context. Other terms used to describe a person's views include perceptions, opinions, attitudes and beliefs.

Pre-primary refers to the pre-compulsory, Western Australian State Government early childhood programs for five year old children. Children attend pre-primary for four full days per week.

Early childhood programs refer to preschool programs for children 3-5 years old offered in Australia and other parts of the world.

Curriculum, in this study, encompasses all aspects of the learning program in early childhood and primary classrooms, including content taught and environments established to facilitate learning.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the key elements of the current study:

- Investigating possible sources of pressure on early childhood teachers to formalise the pre-primary curriculum; and
- Exploring what parents and teachers think children should learn and experience in the pre-primary year.

The chapter has established the need for the current study in the current climate of early childhood education in Western Australia.

The following chapters will review literature pertinent to the study; provide a theoretical framework for the study; discuss the research methods used; describe the results and draw conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study. The literature has been addressed in five sections in order to support the aims of the study. First, home/school collaboration is reviewed by looking at the history of parent involvement; government policy on parents' involvement in schools; and the impact of parent-teacher collaboration on student achievement. The second section discusses parents' and teachers' views. Consideration is given to the diversity of parents and teachers. Third, the formalisation of the pre-primary curriculum is considered as a continuum from the traditional program to the academic program. Reasons for the escalating curriculum are discussed and conclusions are drawn. Fourth, similar studies are investigated to draw parallels and identify findings in relation to the current study. Finally literature related to the chosen methodology is reviewed.

Home/School Collaboration

This section will explore a brief history of parent-teacher collaboration. It is necessary to understand some of the pertinent historical context to understand the present context of parents' involvement in schools. Government policies have had an impact on parent/community involvement in schools. Some important government reports and documents are discussed. Finally the impact of parent-teacher collaboration on student achievement is explored.

A Brief History of Parent Collaboration in Schools

During the 1920s Parent and Citizen Associations (P&Cs) were established. The P&Cs role was to fundraise and perform any other roles which 'helped' the school. This allowed schools and teachers to remain relatively isolated. Parents were useful in helping schools by covering books and helping out with busy bees but held no position of value in educating the child. During the 1960 / 1970s many factors contributed to schools leaving this position of isolation and gradually increasing their level of parent/teacher collaboration. These included the increasing 'voice' of P&C Associations and trends and research overseas. For example, the US program Head Start was based, "on the assumption that parents' attitudes and support were crucial for children's development and achievement" (Smith, 1980, p. 6).

Despite the acceptance in Australia that parent/ teacher collaboration was important, the reality was that parents still tended to be limited to fundraising and covering library books (Ebbeck, 1979; Wilson, 1979). Ebbeck (1979) also suggests that, "...the majority of parents appear contented with the status quo and prepared to accept leadership from others – mainly the professionals..." (p. 32).

Government Policy on Parent Involvement

In 1973, the Karmel Report, highlighted the need for "greater devolution of responsibility to the local school level, and community involvement" (Cited in Pettit, 1980, p. 15). In March 1984 the Beazley Report was presented in Western Australia. It recommended that schools be given various models of community participation, from

which they could choose the model that best suited them. Also, it recommended a review of the Education Act, which severely restricted the ability of parents or the community to be involved in decision making.

In the years that followed the Beazley Report, School Decision-Making Groups were established in Western Australia. The Schools Decision-Making Groups comprised equal members from the community and from the school's staff, plus the Principal, which meant that control remained with the school.

Parental opposition to policy in Western Australia has raised pre-primary on the political and community agenda. Parents objected to a policy change regarding students' entry age, which demonstrated parents' desire to be involved to some degree in decision making in education, and highlighted a need for more effective collaboration between parents and educators.

Home / School Collaboration and Students' Achievements

The link between parent/teacher collaboration and student achievement has been well documented. Researchers have identified links between parent involvement and higher student achievement (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Reynolds, 1992). Toomey (1989) found that parent involvement improved students' achievements in reading. More surprisingly, Toomey (1989) also suggests that high levels of parent involvement have a positive effect on teachers' expectations of students. Programs that foster collaboration between parents and teachers to construct shared understandings are more likely to succeed than those that do not (Spiegel, Fitzgerald & Cunningham,

1993). Schools may operate well with no parent-teacher collaboration, however, these schools will achieve greater results with collaboration (Shimron, 1991).

Powell (1989) discussed three underlying assumptions of discontinuities between home and school that may guide collaboration:

- (1) Discontinuities exist between families and nonfamilial early childhood settings;
- (2) discontinuities may have negative effects on children (and conversely, continuity between settings is beneficial to children); and
- (3) communication between parents and early childhood program staff can increase the level of continuity between home and program(s)

(p. 23)

Differences between homes and schools may impact on children's transitions to school. The most striking difference is perhaps the adult to child ratio. Other differences include the different roles of parent and teacher, the socio-economic status of the family, ethnicity and differing socialisation patterns between home and school. A child whose culture and language are different from the general school population, may be at greater risk of not succeeding than a child whose culture and language match that of the school, however, collaboration between parents and teachers can lessen the difficulties encountered by the child (Epstein, 1987).

In summary, research suggests that all children will benefit from collaboration between home and school in the early years. Some children will face greater risks of failure at school. Risk factors include ethnicity, parents' level of schooling, socio-economic status and parents who hold negative perceptions of school (Powell, 1989). Another

risk factor could be the level of parent collaboration with schools, as Toomey (1989) indicates a possible link between parent involvement and greater teacher expectancy effects leading to greater achievement for students. Parr, McNaughton, Timperley & Robinson (1993) stress that:

It is particularly important in the transition to school year to ensure that, as far as possible, classroom culture melds with that of the home on pedagogically important and effective variables. Parental collaboration would seem a logical first step. (p. 41)

Parents' and Teachers' Views

Research has shown that parents and teachers who work together can provide enhanced educational opportunities for the child, but is this an achievable goal? Literature suggests that parents and teachers come from 'different worlds', and that, "parents feel less important than teachers. As in the case of the professional authority of teachers, such a 'volunteer' or 'helping out' model reinforces to parents their less important position." (Keck, 1987, p. 223)

In recent years researchers have investigated and compared parents' and teachers' views of education. In the late 70s in Australia, Ebbeck began a study of parents' and teachers' views of preschool education. Her research investigated the perceived purposes of preschool education and the parents' role in preschool. Ebbeck (1996) extended the study to families in Hong Kong and The People's Republic of China. Other studies have investigated the perceptions and/or expectations of parents and teachers (Rothlein & Brett, 1987; Graue, 1993a; Keck, 1987). Predominantly these

studies found significant differences between the views of parents and teachers, however, Ebbeck (1996) found that, in China, parents' and teachers' perceptions about the purposes of pre-schools and the parents' role in preschool are highly congruent.

Differences between parents' and teachers' views have been attributed mainly to the different socialisation patterns of parents and teachers. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Graue (1993b) identify ecological influences, particularly on parents, which mean that parent perceptions, expectations and beliefs are shaped by the culture to which they belong, and the socialisation they receive within this culture. Consequently cross-cultural studies of parent perceptions have yielded differences between parents of different cultures (Carlson & Stenmalm-Sjoblom, 1989; Graue, 1993b). However, parents and teachers within a cultural group may have different perceptions, as these groups are not homogenous.

Graue's study (1993a) of parents' expectations for school illustrates within group differences. Graue's study (1993a) found that some parents wanted children to participate in a program which met their developmental needs, whilst at the same time, other parents wanted their child to accumulate academic knowledge at an early age. Similarly differences between teachers were found. One teacher explained that she operated her class at an early first-grade level whilst another teacher was more concerned with children setting their own pace.

The school community of parents and teachers is made up of a melting pot of attitudes, previous experiences, expectations, beliefs and educational backgrounds. The task of forming effective partnerships between parents and teachers is difficult, however the research indicates that it is a worthwhile goal (Toomey, 1989; Shimron, 1991).

Early Childhood and Primary School Pedagogy

In recent years, researchers have expressed concern about the growing emphasis on 'academics' in pre-primary (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Dolipoulou, 1996; Elkind, 1993; Shepard & Smith, 1988). The major issue appears to be whether pre-primary becomes a "toned-down" year one program, or retains specialist pedagogy and traditional child centred focus. A shift in curriculum is being observed, pushing much of what used to be seen in a year one classroom into the pre-primary centre. The move towards a more formal program in pre-primary reflects conflicting ideologies about the way children learn (Spodek, 1988).

The Traditional Program

The traditional pre-primary program is typically described as one where children are active learners. Greenberg (1990) suggests that in the traditional pre-primary, children learn best through, "enriched free play and teacher-designed, teacher-guided projects usually planned so they expand upon what the child has freely elected to do" (p. 71). The traditional program may also be described as a developmentally appropriate or child-centred program. These programs would typically follow closely the NAEYC's guidelines for appropriate practice in Early Childhood Programs (Bredekamp, 1997). The teacher in this program encourages the child to be responsible for their own learning while supporting this learning and employing more direct teaching methods where appropriate. An observer may construe the classroom to be chaotic because children are accessing many areas of the classroom at once without the teacher directing each activity. However, it is a structured learning environment which is planned carefully by the teacher to facilitate an emergent or negotiated child-centred curriculum.

Play is often considered a key component of this type of program. The traditional pre-primary centre has many different learning areas around the room, including home corner, block corner, puzzles and manipulative materials. The type of play seen in a pre-primary classroom, is not typically the type of play children participate in at home (Brewer & Kieff, 1997). Pre-service training is attributed with the prevalence of developmentally appropriate practice amongst early childhood teachers (Dunn & Kontos, 1997). Earlier studies of teachers' beliefs have revealed incongruence between knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice and classroom practice (Doliopoulou, 1996; Rothlein & Brett, 1987). Teachers are trained to understand the benefits of play in the development of children, however a need may exist for teachers to explain the value of play and other elements of the curriculum to others and, at the same time, reinforce developmentally appropriate practice to themselves. Parents, in particular, may be anxious about children 'playing' all day, as they are unaware of the learning implicit in the play (Rothlein & Brett, 1987).

The Academic Program

The academic pre-primary program is one in which the teacher is the centre of the program rather than the child. The teacher teaches what s/he believes should be taught. A basic assumption is that children learn what they are taught, and they learn when they sit still, pay attention and are given limited opportunity for spontaneous, self chosen discovery type learning (Greenberg, 1990). The academic pre-primary has a greater emphasis on skill areas such as reading, writing and maths, and offers a 'watered down'

year one program, where play is seen as activity children do when they have finished learning, not as a means of learning. Rothlein & Brett's (1987) study of perceptions of play conclude that teachers and parents undervalued play as an important part of the curriculum in early childhood programs. Only 20% of preschool teachers considered play to be an important part of their program (Rothlein & Brett, 1987). This study draws attention once more to a possible contradiction between the tacit knowledge and classroom practice of teachers, as it is quite possible that these teachers would understand the value of play in an early childhood classroom whilst establishing a classroom which does not encourage play.

Reasons for the Escalating Curriculum

The formalising of the curriculum in pre-primaries has been socially, politically and economically driven (Elkind, 1986). Research has failed to identify educational benefit or academic progress, but schools seem powerless to resist the push to formalise the program. Elkind (1993) and Shepard & Smith (1988) identify several reasons for curriculum escalation in the United States, and many parallels can be drawn with the educational climate in Western Australian schools.

Parental Pressure

The increase in working mothers in recent times has led to a greater need for child care of children under 6 years old. Elkind (1993), suggests that many working parents feel a sense of guilt at not fulfilling their parental roles by caring for their young children. These parents readily accept the reasoning that their child is receiving an educational program that they could not provide, and that they are 'learning' in the early childhood program. As Doremus (1986) notes, "many parents equate going to school with

learning to read and other academic tasks. 'This lack of knowledge of the meaning of school for young children is at the root of the "sooner is better" syndrome" (p. 35).

Early academics is a direct result of the 'sooner is better' approach. As has been noted many parents readily accept this notion because as Doremus (1986) points out "few adults understand the developmental needs of young children" (p. 35). Parents may need education to help them understand children's developmental needs.

The Inclusion in Primary Schools

Pre-primaries in Western Australia recently became part of primary schools. Principals of these schools, many of whom were not aware of early childhood philosophy (Stamopoulos, 1998), have accepted administrative control of these programs. These administrators are unable to argue against pressure for increased academics and they may view increased formality as a "good thing" for children. Anecdotal evidence suggests that principals see increased formality as better preparation for year one.

Children Attending Pre-primary

Nearly 100% of eligible children now attend pre-primary programs and Shepard & Smith (1988) suggest that this has increased the expectations of first grade teachers. This extra year of school for young children has been seen as an opportunity to teach them more, and therefore some of the year one curriculum is being 'pushed down' to pre-primary. Unfortunately little consideration has been given to the developmental needs of the child. Whilst teachers could 'teach' writing and reading in pre-primary, this does not mean that all children are developmentally ready to 'learn' these skills.

Early academic pressure on young children has been linked to symptoms of stress, losing motivation for learning and burnout later in their school career (Elkind, 1993).

Increasing Pressure on Early Childhood Teachers

The increase in pressure from peers, parents and administrators has resulted in many early childhood trained teachers feeling that they have lost the fight against curriculum escalation in pre-primaries (Goldstein, 1997; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Hills, 1987). Many factors have contributed to early childhood teachers feeling disempowered and being reluctant to articulate their pedagogy. The literature indicates that some principals have placed pedagogically ill-founded expectations on early childhood teachers (Stamopoulos, 1998; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Stamopoulos (1998) attributes the principals' pressure on early childhood teachers to the principals' lack of training and early childhood knowledge. Early childhood teachers are under increasing pressure to be accountable and maintain minimum standards, resulting in more skill based programs that aim to meet standards (Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

Effects of Curriculum Escalation

Shepard & Smith (1988) identify three results of curriculum escalation in the United States – raising the entry age, retention and readiness screening. Currently readiness screening is not apparent in the Western Australian school system. However policies to raise the entry age have been accepted and will occur in 2002 in our schools.

Raising the Entry Age

The Good Start program in Western Australia is increasing the entry age to pre-primary programs in 2002. The change in policy is based on the belief that, “children will be more mature and responsive to the developmental programs they will be offered” (Education Department, 1995, p. 1). However, Shepard & Smith (1988) argue that expectations are “normatively driven” (p. 138). Each teacher will assess the abilities of the children in the class and aim the teaching at the norm ability range. In every class, regardless of entry age, there will be a twelve-month range of abilities. Therefore the twelve-month range in abilities appears to be the difficulty, not the age that the child begins school. When the entry age is altered the youngest children in the class will struggle to cope with a program which is aimed at the norm. Elkind (1993) refers to this as the “age effect”. A side effect of changing the entry age is that the expectations for the ‘older’ children promote further escalations in the curriculum, seeming to defeat the purpose of the change. Elkind (1993) suggests that delayed entrance is a, “disguised form of retention” and that, “retention in any form puts children at risk” (p. 84). A trademark of the traditional pre-primary program is individual appropriateness. Early childhood teachers have been trained to cater for the individual needs of the children in their class, while catering for the needs of the whole group, which ideally should occur regardless of the entry age of the children.

Retention

Retention is another product of curriculum escalation as many children are judged as not being ready for year one programs because they do not know their sounds or other skills, which used to be taught in year one. However Gredler (1984) and Shepard & Smith (1987) found that retention or placement in transition rooms did not significantly

improve educational outcomes for 'not ready' children. Gredler (1984) recommends intervention within the regular class for these children. The side effect of retention is that the group of children who do enter year one raise the norms of the year one classroom, and once again escalate the curriculum and expectations.

A worrying effect of the escalating curriculum is the notion of children 'failing' at five years old. Elkind (1987) suggests that pushing young children may lead to, "stress and educational burnout in elementary school" (p. 14). It is possible that exposing children to a more formal program may do more educational harm than good.

Summary

Greenberg (1990) suggests that the traditional program is not an excellent program in its pure sense and neither is the academic program because of the variations and impact of the socio-cultural contexts on child development. However the literature suggests that the ideal program should be closer to the traditional end of the traditional-academic continua (Bredekamp, 1997; Elkind, 1993; Shepard & Smith, 1988). Delivery of age and individually appropriate programs to young children can only occur if early childhood teachers have a thorough knowledge of child development and appropriate early childhood practice, and have the support of government departments, the community, administrators and peers.

Similar Studies

This section reviews studies that are similar to the current study. First, the work of Marjory Ebbeck (1981-1996) is discussed. Ebbeck investigated parents' and teachers' perceptions of pre-school education in South Australia and more recently in Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China. Second, Webster & Wood's (1986) study in the United States is discussed. Parents from 100 kindergartens were surveyed about what they wanted for their children. Third, Hewitt's (1998) study of parental perceptions of pre-school education in Malaysia is reviewed with particular attention to two terms used to classify parents' perceptions. Fourth, the results of a working party addressing continuity between home-K-year one in Western Australian schools (1985) are examined.

Ebbeck's Studies

Much of Ebbeck's work since the late 1970s has investigated parental involvement in pre-schools and parents' and teachers' perceptions of pre-school. Her study in 1981 surveyed and interviewed parents and teachers about the purposes of pre-school education and the role parents play in pre-school. It was found that parents' and teachers' perceptions of pre-school differed. The differences between parents' and teachers' perception of the role of the parent in pre-school were even more significant. This study called for further study to explore parent and teacher perceptions in other states of Australia.

In 1995 Ebbeck published a study of teachers' and parents' views of the purposes of early childhood education in Hong Kong. Interviews with 100 parents and 100 teachers were conducted. This study again found significant differences between expressed views of parents and teachers. Ebbeck (1995) once again called for further study to support her findings, and affirmed that parents and teachers who collaborate successfully provide more effective pre-school settings for children. In 1996 Ebbeck conducted a similar study in The People's Republic of China. However, interestingly in China, high congruence was found between parents' and teachers' views in relation to the purposes of pre-school and the parents' role in pre-school.

Webster and Wood's study

Webster (1984) raised concerns about a move toward more formal schooling in kindergartens. A questionnaire was sent to kindergarten parents in 100 schools in South Dakota. Over 2200 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire consisted of 15 experiences that parents were asked to rank, according to how necessary they deemed them to be to the kindergarten program. Five of the fifteen experiences could be considered child initiated whilst the other ten were teacher initiated. This study found that parents expected formal skills to be taught. Skills such as teaching counting and number recognition, phonics and the alphabet, beginning handwriting instruction and learning to sit still and do seat work ranked in the top five most necessary activities in kindergarten. Child initiated experiences were given a lower ranking than teacher initiated experiences. However the child initiated experiences were still given some degree of necessity, for example, 46% parents thought daily physical activities were very necessary, and 48% parents deemed physical activity necessary.

This study concluded that parents wanted, “both academic and developmental activities for their children” (Webster & Wood, 1986, p. 9). As Webster (1984) says, “Today’s parents want it all for their pre-school children” (p. 2). Webster & Wood (1986) also stress that, “we must continue to ask parents for their opinions and suggestions. Open communication with parents is necessary if we are to improve the kindergarten curriculum of the future” (p. 10).

Hewitt’s study

Hewitt (1998) investigated parental perceptions of pre-school education in Malaysia. A group of 21 parents were interviewed about their perceptions of pre-school education, practices and the care-giver. Hewitt expanded upon the work of Hess, Price, Dickson & Conroy (1981) in developing a model to categorise parent perceptions. Two categories were used to group parent responses – idealised perceptions and actualised perceptions. Idealised perceptions are those that would exist in a perfect world – the way we would like things to be. Actualised perceptions are more realistic -- what we think will really happen. Hewitt requests further research to test the usefulness of this model.

Hewitt’s study supported Webster & Wood’s findings that parents wanted everything for their children. Parents wanted their child to participate in programs that catered for their needs including social – emotional needs yet at the same time parents expressed a desire for the program to provide the academic skills they felt were necessary for their child’s future success. Hewitt suggests that parents’ knowledge is socially and culturally constructed and professionals from the early childhood field

should judge the quality of programs by socio-cultural as well as developmentally appropriate guidelines. Hewitt suggests that notions of developmental appropriateness vary in different contexts. Collaboration between home and school is recommended to assist parents to refine their understandings of idealised and actualised perceptions.

The current study expands upon Hewitt's study by exploring the perceptions of parents and teachers in an Australian context. The results complement Hewitt's work on actualised and idealised perceptions.

Working Party Addressing Continuity in Children's Learning Experiences Home-K-

Year 1

The working party set up by the Education Department of Western Australia (1985) investigated continuity through a series of workshops where participants formed groups to discuss issues about continuity and suggest possible strategies to improve continuity. The participants included parents and pre-primary and year one teachers in one group, and principals, deputy principals and junior primary coordinators in another group. A limitation of the study was the participants' degree of freedom to express themselves openly. Parents may have been particularly reluctant to raise issues about the school in the company of the teachers.

The results of these workshops showed that some parents, principals and teachers differed in their views of the main purpose of the pre-primary and year one programme. The study reported that some participants held inappropriate expectations of the year one programme and parents noted that principals seemed less interested in the younger

children than the older children in the school. All parties expected that pre-primary children should become familiar with the school setting.

Summary

Each of the four studies discussed has informed the present study. This study investigates issues in Western Australian pre-primaries, but the findings will inform a variety of contexts as similar concerns have been raised in different parts of the world.

Review of Methodology

Previous research investigating parents' and teachers' perceptions have used questionnaires, interviews, workshop sessions or a combination of these. Burns (1994), de Vaus (1985) and Krathwohl (1993) encourage consideration of the following factors when choosing which approach to use: cost; time; sample size; probing for further information; length of interview; the nature of the population; and the information sought. They suggest that the method employed will be a compromise after consideration of these factors. Deschamp & Tognolini (1983) suggest that a questionnaire should only be used when it is necessary to ensure anonymity; where the population is widespread; when access to a large number of people is desired; and/or there is a lack of resources to conduct personal interviews. According to Gay (1987) the major criticism of questionnaires is, "related not to their use but to their misuse" (p. 195). Poorly designed and/or carelessly administered questionnaires generate poor results. However, a well-designed instrument that is carefully administered will give valuable data for analysis. Gay (1987) recommends that the development of a good

questionnaire includes: clearly identifying the problem; careful selection of the sample; consideration of the presentation; the length; types of questions included; and the clarity of directions and questions.

This study is classed as a descriptive sample survey, which is described by Burns (1994) as a method used, “to estimate as precisely as possible the nature of existing conditions or attributes of a population” (p. 344). It is called a sample survey because it does not canvas 100% of the population of parents and teachers in pre-primary centres. This type of survey has been chosen to allow the researcher to gain access to as large a sample as possible, given restrictions of time and cost.

Collection of data, within a sample survey requires: designing a questionnaire that will provide answers to the research questions; piloting of the questionnaire; selecting the sample; distributing and collecting questionnaires and piloting of data analysis to determine whether the information sought can be obtained and analysed.

Validity

Considerations of validity are paramount in the preparation of a research study. Results are of little value if the validity of the study is questionable. Burns (1994) suggests, “having some competent colleagues who are familiar with the purpose of the survey examine the items to judge whether they are adequate for measuring what they are supposed to measure” (p. 364). Burns (1994) also suggests that respondents who have a high level of interest in the topic will provide more valid responses. It is suggested that no others have a greater interest in pre-primary education than teachers and parents,

therefore we can assume a high level of valid responses. Response rates will also be high if respondents have an interest in the results.

Anonymity also increases the level of validity in a study, as anonymity “assumes greater truthfulness will be obtained” (Burns, 1994, p. 364). The design of this study has provided a high level of anonymity.

Many texts suggest a response rate over 70% is desirable to allow generalisations to be made and to increase validity (Gay, 1987; Deschamp & Tognolini, 1983).

Consideration was given to this during the implementation of the survey and strategies employed to maximise response rates.

Reliability

A survey of people’s views is inherently an overview of the situation at that particular time, and if the study were to be replicated in a year’s time it is likely that the same people may have altered their opinions due to further education or experiences. Also administering the same questionnaire to the same people within a short period of time is not always a good measure of reliability as the people may remember what they had already written and repeat their responses. It is accepted that answers may change over time and it is reasonable to expect them to do so.

An element of redundancy has been incorporated into the design of the questionnaire. Questions were designed to allow respondents to comment broadly on their views of the pre-primary program and then to focus on the specific elements they see as important.

This will allow for a check of internal consistency whilst also allowing the researcher to explore whether there is a link between overall views and specific views.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of any study. Leedy (1997) categorises ethics in research into:

considerations of fairness, honesty, openness of intent, disclosure of methods, the ends for which the research is executed, a respect for the integrity of the individual, the obligation of the researcher to guarantee unequivocally individual privacy, and an informed willingness on the part of the subject to participate voluntarily (p. 116)

Surveys, by their nature, contain inherent regard for ethical use of human participants in research. The survey used in this study guaranteed anonymity for both participants and the schools involved and the participants were aware of the intended use of their responses. Participation was voluntary and the report of the results does not identify individual schools or respondents. The results should benefit all participants directly and indirectly by enhancing the delivery of early childhood education. All participating schools have been sent copies of the results of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

This study is based upon the work of two theorists, Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky, who examined the impact of social interactions upon children's learning in different yet complementary ways. Key points of Bronfenbrenner's and Vygotsky's theories provide the theoretical framework for the current study.

Vygotskian Theory

Vygotskian theory asserts that, "humans are embedded in a social matrix (context) and human behaviour cannot be understood independently of this matrix" (Miller, 1993, p. 370). Children do not exist in a vacuum, rather they are constantly interacting with significant others and these interactions shape children's development. Adults and more capable children are the key to a child's cognitive development. As children interact with others in their environment they are supported in their investigations of their world with the language they need to describe their world and the concepts and skills they need for further development. For example, when a child sees a cow for the first time s/he needs a more capable peer or adult to supply the name of this strange creature. They will never identify it as a cow on their own.

Vygotsky's concepts of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development are useful in examining the impact of parent and child interactions on the development of the child.

Research shows that children achieve better results when their parents scaffold their learning (Freund, 1990, cited in Miller, 1993).) Many parents do scaffold their children's learning every day whilst participating in such activities as cooking dinner or walking through the park. When parents and teachers collaborate they may be able to extend this scaffolding to support the learning in the home and at school. Collaboration between parents and teachers may enable both groups to more easily identify the child's zone of proximal development and provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences. It would seem advantageous, then, for parents and teachers to collaborate to provide cohesive educational and emotional support for the child.

During the early childhood years, interactions with significant others have a profound effect on the child's development. At the same time a reciprocal relationship exists: the child is affected by their context and the child affects their context. The views that parents and teachers have of the pre-primary program will affect the child and the child will affect the views of teachers and parents. Parents and teachers construct knowledge about the content of the early childhood curriculum and pedagogy through social interaction. The quality of these interactions will directly affect the benefits obtained through collaboration.

Bronfenbrenner's Theory

As with Vygotskyian theory, Bronfenbrenner explores the reciprocal effects between children and their context. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory reports on the effects on the child of their immediate surroundings, whilst also including a complex range of relationships, both direct and indirect, impacting on the child. These

‘relationships’ include the physical environment in which they live, interactions with others and external impacts such as government policies and the cultural context.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes four settings interacting with the child ranging from the microsystem of immediate surroundings to the macrosystem or the dominant belief and ideologies of the culture.

Microsystem - the reciprocal direct relationships between the child and significant others in their immediate surroundings, for example, parents and teachers.

Mesosystem – the relationships between microsystems, for example, the way interactions in the home affect school and vice versa.

Exosystem – the social contexts that do not involve the child but impact on the child, for example, government policy changes affecting the provision of early childhood education.

Macrosystem – encompasses the laws, values and customs of the culture in which the child lives, for example, traditional gender stereotypes within a culture will have some impact on a child’s educational and career opportunities.

This study is primarily focussed on the mesosystem interactions between schools and homes. This study is based on the belief that a child’s level of success in school is dependent on many factors, not all of which are controlled by the school.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) supports this when he says, “a child’s ability to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and the nature of ties between the school and the home.” (p. 3)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) discusses ‘ecological transitions’ and “shifts in role or setting” (p. 6). These may include, “arrival of a younger sibling, entry into preschool or school,

being promoted, graduating, finding a job” (p. 6). These transitions led Bronfenbrenner to explore the impact of a child’s settings during transitions and whether some children experienced more ‘risk’ or ‘opportunity’ than others. For example, a child learning to read is more likely to experience greater ‘opportunity’ if he/she lives in a household where literacy is encouraged and supported. Conversely, a child may experience ‘risk’ in a household where literacy is not encouraged, school attendance is poor and the home/school relationship is hostile. Parents and teachers may better support the child through collaboration especially during the ecological transition of entry into pre-primary.

Summary

Both Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky demonstrate why children can not be considered to develop ‘in a vacuum’. Children affect their environment and the environment affects their development. Therefore, children’s level of success will depend primarily on a complex matrix of events and interactions. It is the purpose of this study to develop an understanding of what parents and teachers think is important for children to learn and experience in the pre-primary year. It is suggested that when the mesosystem of home and school unite in a common purpose during the pre-primary year, there will be many benefits for children.

Conceptual Framework

The following section explains the conceptual framework upon which this study is based. It describes the interrelated events/experiences that impact on children in early childhood programs.

Many researchers have noted that social and cultural influences have an effect on people's views (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Carlson, Stenholm-Sjoberg, 1989; Graue, 1993a; Laosa, 1982). The conceptual framework (Figure 3:1) shows a reciprocal effect between parents' / teachers' views and social / cultural influences. Parents' and teachers' views will have an effect on the pre-primary program. The program may also influence parents' views as observations of the classroom and teacher will influence what the parents believe is appropriate. Parents' and teachers' views and the resulting program will impact on the child.

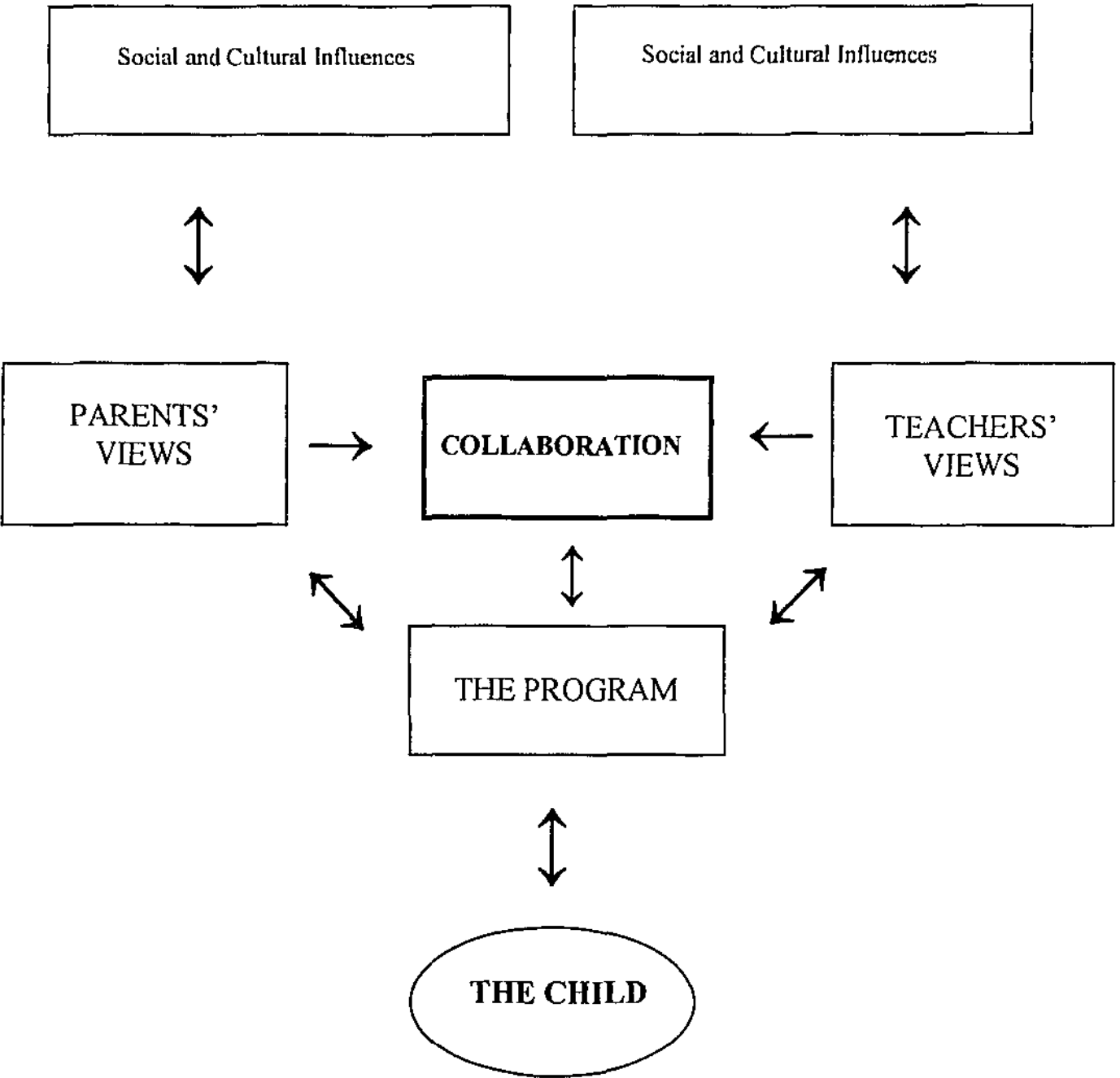


Figure 3:1 Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methods employed to identify parents' and teachers' views of the pre-primary curriculum, and to analyse these views.

Sample

A sample survey was employed to gather results, which may be considered representative of the population of parents, pre-primary teachers and year one teachers in metropolitan Western Australian schools. The sample targeted in this study consisted of 60 teachers (30 pre-primary teachers and 30 year one teachers) and 150 parents. A total of 30 pre-primary classes and 30 year one classes participated in the study.

Three school districts were identified for this study. These districts represented a wide range of socio-economic groups, making them representative of the broader population. Within each district, a random selection of schools was made until 10 pre-primary and year one classes had agreed to participate.

The pre-primary and year one teachers from each school were asked to complete a questionnaire, and further questionnaires were issued to five parents from each pre-primary class. These parents were chosen randomly from the class roll by selecting the child who appears first, fifth, tenth, fifteenth and twentieth on the roll and sending a questionnaire home to their parents.

Design

During the design phase of the questionnaire, factors such as presentation, length, question types and response types, clarity of directions and sequence of questions were considered. As this study explored parents' and teachers' views, the questionnaire contained a mixture of open and closed question types. The closed questions allowed for easier analysis whilst the open ended questions allowed for useful and insightful information which would confirm or refute answers made elsewhere in the questionnaire.

Instruments

This study used two questionnaires, one for parents¹ and one for teachers² (both pre-primary and year one teachers received the same questionnaire). The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. These are described below:

General Information

This section asked for information about the gender of respondents. The parent questionnaire also was able to ascertain whether one or both parents completed the questionnaire. The teacher questionnaire gathered data about year level being taught and years of teaching experience. This section differed between parent and teacher questionnaires.

¹ See Appendix A

² See Appendix B

The Pre-Primary Program

This section of the questionnaires was identical for both teacher and parent questionnaires except for two additional questions for the parents. This allowed for direct comparison of responses and was the main section of the survey. This section asked parents and teachers to consider what they think is most important for children to learn at pre-primary, the most important activities at pre-primary, the main purpose of pre-primary, the most important skills for children to have when they enter year one and how satisfied they are with the current pre-primary program offered in Western Australia. Parents were asked where they receive most of their information about the pre-primary program and what they think is important to know at the end of pre-primary. These questions were a combination of closed and open question types.

General Comments

This section gave respondents an opportunity to comment further on the pre-primary program in Western Australia. This section allows identification of issues arising from the delivery of pre-primary programs not already identified by the researcher.

Procedure

The following steps were taken during this study:

Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to ascertain parents' and teachers' views of the pre-primary program. Literature on questionnaire design and other studies investigating parents' and teachers' views contributed to the design. Feedback from peers, supervisors and research consultants was also sought at this stage.

Piloting of questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted and feedback was sought on clarity of directions and questions which should be omitted or those that could be included. Comments were also sought on length of time to complete and presentation of the questionnaire. The piloting resulted in some changes to the format and content of the questionnaire.

Piloting of analysis

Using the results of the pilot the proposed analyses were trialed to ensure that the questions could be analysed in the manner proposed and that the questions would yield the type of information sought. This pilot also provided an opportunity to determine some of the coding that may be employed in the open-ended questions.

Procedure

Schools, via the principal, were contacted personally and asked if they would participate in the study. The principal of each school who agreed to participate, received a package which included – a letter detailing the principal's role in distributing, collecting and returning the questionnaires, sufficient copies of teacher and parent questionnaires and a return envelope for each questionnaire. A suggested date for return of questionnaires was included. When this date passed, reminder calls were made to the principals and teachers, which maximised the percentage of returns.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to answer three questions. The first two questions refer to the views of parents and teachers. These two questions are answered largely by analysis of frequency tables and graphs compiled from the closed questions. The open-ended questions required coding prior to graphic and tabular representation. To answer the third question, the comparison of parents' and teachers' views, more complex analysis was required. Further coding was employed and grouping of variables was used to achieve interesting comparisons of views. Comparison of means using independent samples t-tests were performed to establish significance of results. Significance was accepted where $P < 0.05$.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

A great deal of attention has been given to validity in this study. If the questionnaire did not measure what it was supposed to measure the information would be of little value. As previously noted, consultation with relevant professionals and piloting of the questionnaire increased the validity of the instrument used.

Anonymity is another way this study has increased its level of validity. Names were not required on the questionnaire and each respondent was issued with an envelope within which to seal their response and maintain their anonymity from other members of the school population.

Decisions about the selection of the sample were made to eliminate bias and increase levels of representativeness to the wider population. Three school districts were chosen which represented people of varying backgrounds, for example, level of socio-economic status, employment and education level of parents. Random selection of schools and respondents was employed to further eliminate bias.

Coding was employed during the data analysis stage of the study. After the researcher completed the initial coding, a colleague checked the coding of randomly selected responses to again increase the validity of the results.

All response rates exceeded the minimums suggested and except for the response of year one teachers, are considered to be very high response rates (Refer to table 5:1).

Reliability

Reliability in this survey has been assured by careful design of the questionnaire. An element of redundancy has been incorporated into the questions to allow the researcher to cross check responses and further analyse the respondents' understandings.

Respondents were asked to identify the most important elements of a pre-primary program. In a subsequent question the respondents were asked to rank several pre-primary activities according to their importance. Interesting comparisons are made between these results.

Limitations

The limitations associated with this study are those associated with all self-administered questionnaire surveys. These include:

Clarification of responses

This method does not allow for further probing of respondents. Ambiguous responses cannot be clarified nor discussed. Also if the respondent misinterprets the question, no opportunity exists to clarify the question to them. All responses must be accepted.

Misinterpretation of responses

The possibility exists that the researcher may misinterpret the response given by the respondent. This is a particular problem during coding. An attempt to overcome this difficulty has been made by cross-checking responses with a colleague.

Honesty of answers

A possibility exists that respondents will answer in the manner they think they 'should' respond. This should be kept to a minimum in this study due to its design and implementation. The questions do not in themselves indicate a 'right' or 'wrong' answer. They simply ask for opinions. Also the anonymity provided should encourage respondents to answer honestly. A possibility exists that the respondents may also receive help to answer the questionnaire, which reduces the validity of the responses.

Low response rates

In the case of this study the potential limitation of a low response rate did not occur. All sections of the sample achieved greater response rates than those recommended in the literature.

Generalising of results

The results of this study could be considered to be limited to the schools in three educational districts in Western Australia, and indeed in a pure sense they are. However the purpose of this study is not to represent all parents' or all teachers' views. Its purpose is to inform educators in Western Australia and to suggest change where necessary within this State. Further, the study enables readers to draw their own generalisations based on their knowledge of their context and the usefulness of these results to that context. As a consequence, the results of the current study may be more or less useful, depending on the context, in Australia and around the world.

All research methods are a compromise. It is true to say that no method is ideal or free of limitations. Many attempts have been made to minimise the limitations and maximise the reliability and validity of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

Response Rates

A total of 210 questionnaires was sent out and returns were as follows.

Table 5:1

Response rates

Questionnaires distributed		No. returned	% returned
Parents	150	125	83%
Pre-primary teachers	30	30	100%
Year one teachers	30	23	76%
Total	210	178	84%

A very good response rate was achieved. Year one teacher returns were significantly lower than pre-primary teacher returns. Perhaps the survey held less significance to year one teachers.

General Information

Question 1 – Gender of Respondents.

Table 5:2

Gender of respondents

Respondents	Male	Female	Both
Parents	4%	90%	6%
Pre-primary teachers	0%	100%	-
Year one teachers	0%	100%	-

A 100% population of female teachers is not surprising, especially in the early years of school, however, the very high response rate of mothers responding alone may indicate that the majority of everyday school requirements, for example notes and forms, are primarily the role of the mother. This does not necessarily indicate that fathers are not involved in decision making, as an importance scale may dictate when fathers become involved. For example, fathers may not need to know when their child orders from the canteen, but may want to know when their child has received a detention. Responding to this survey may not have been seen as important to 90% of fathers, or alternatively 90% of mothers may have responded without consulting fathers. Single parent families would also have an impact on the gender of respondents.

Question 2a – How Many Years Have You Been Teaching? (Teachers Only)

Table 5:3

Teaching experience of respondents

Teaching Experience	PP teachers	Yr 1 teachers
0-5 years	20%	9%
6-10 years	23%	4%
11-15 years	23%	22%
more than 15 years	33%	65%

The mean teaching experience of teachers is very high. Over half have more than 11 years experience. Pre-primary teachers are fairly evenly distributed across the categories, while the year one teachers are heavily oriented towards the more experienced levels.

The Pre-Primary Program

Question 2 – Where Do You Get Most Of Your Information About The Pre-Primary Program? Rank 1-3, 3 = Most Important. (Parents Only)

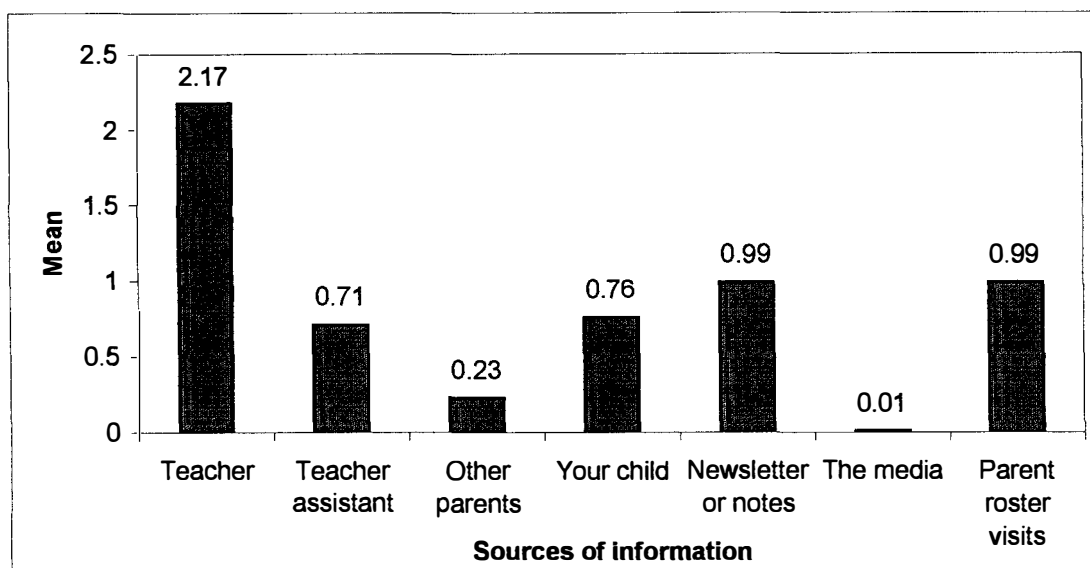


Figure 5:1 Sources of information about the pre-primary program accessed by parents

Other sources identified:

- university
- notes from the teacher
- friends, other students ie brother or sister
- my own previous experience ie older children at pre-primary
- committee meetings

Parents identified the teacher as the primary source of information about the program. Other sources identified as important were the school newsletter or notes, parent roster visits, the child and the teacher assistant. Other parents and the media were considered unimportant sources of information. The data give an indication of the most effective ways of passing on information to parents.

The media, although not highlighted as important in this survey, would be considered the major source of information during the recent significant changes to early childhood education. An example of this would be the implementation of Good Start. Parents predominantly received information via the media during the implementation of this policy, as teachers were relying on media reports and media releases from the Education Department for their information. It is interesting that parents did not identify the media as a more significant source of information.

Question 3 – At Pre-Primary I Think It Is Most Important That Children Learn:
(Please Choose The 3 Most Important Things And Rank Them 1-3, Where 3 = Most

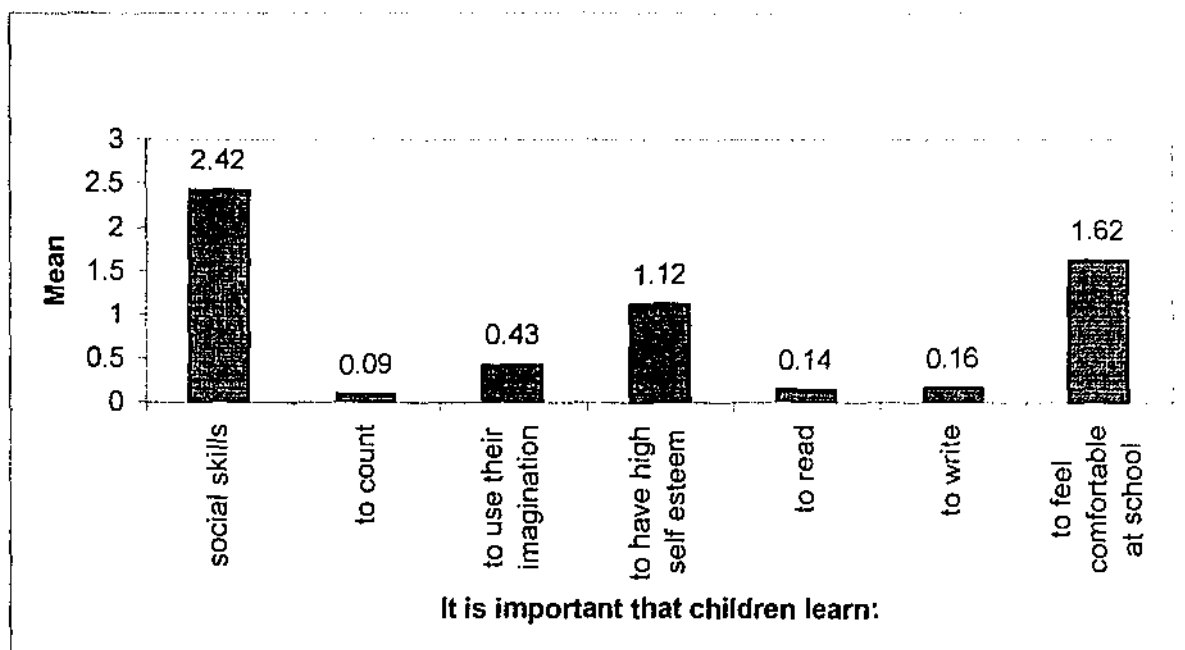


Figure 5:2 What parents think is important for children to learn at pre-primary.

Other comments:

- develop independent skills
- colours, reading, writing, shapes... the whole program
- to enjoy learning and coming to school and also to read, write and count

As shown in Figure 5:2, parents identified social skills, feeling comfortable at school and high self esteem as the most important things that children can learn at pre-primary. The more formal skills: counting, reading and writing were given much lower ratings. It can then be assumed that parents believe pre-primary is a place to acquire social skills and that the more formal skills can be left until later, perhaps year one!

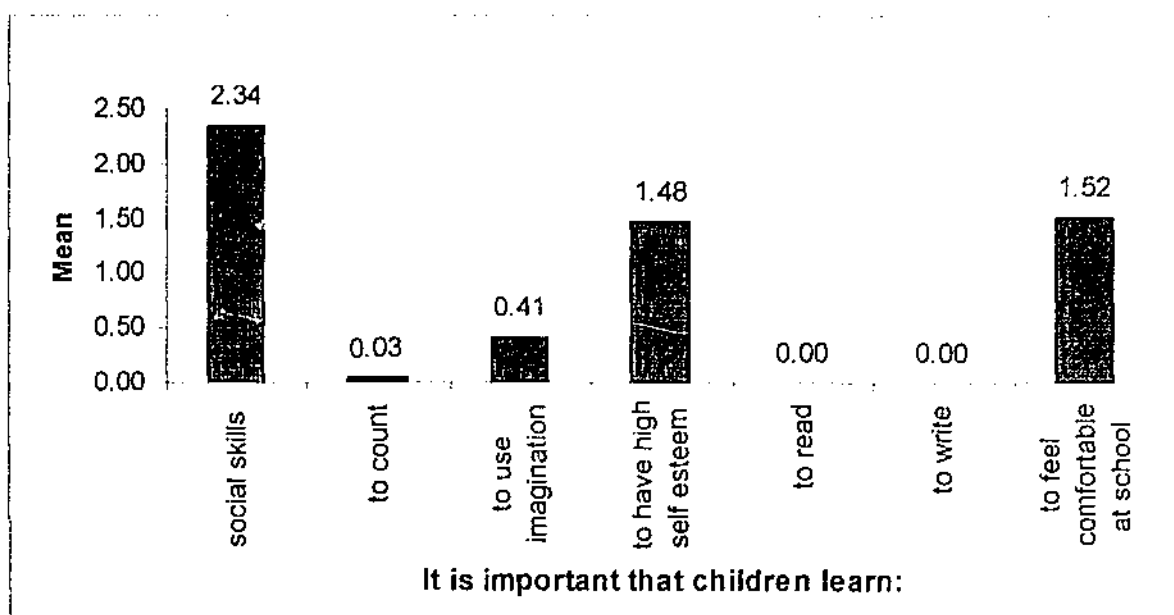


Figure 5:3 What pre-primary teachers think is most important for children to learn at pre-primary.

Other comments:

- basic skills to promote a transition from home to more formal schooling in year one
- to reach their potential
- appropriate skills in all developmental areas
- language skills – good receptive skills and expressive skills
- a positive attitude towards themselves and towards learning

The pre-primary teachers gave ratings very similar to the parents' ratings. Pre-primary teachers also identified social skills, feeling comfortable at school and high self esteem as the most important things children can learn at pre-primary. Pre-primary teachers gave reading, writing and counting even lower ratings than the parents did.

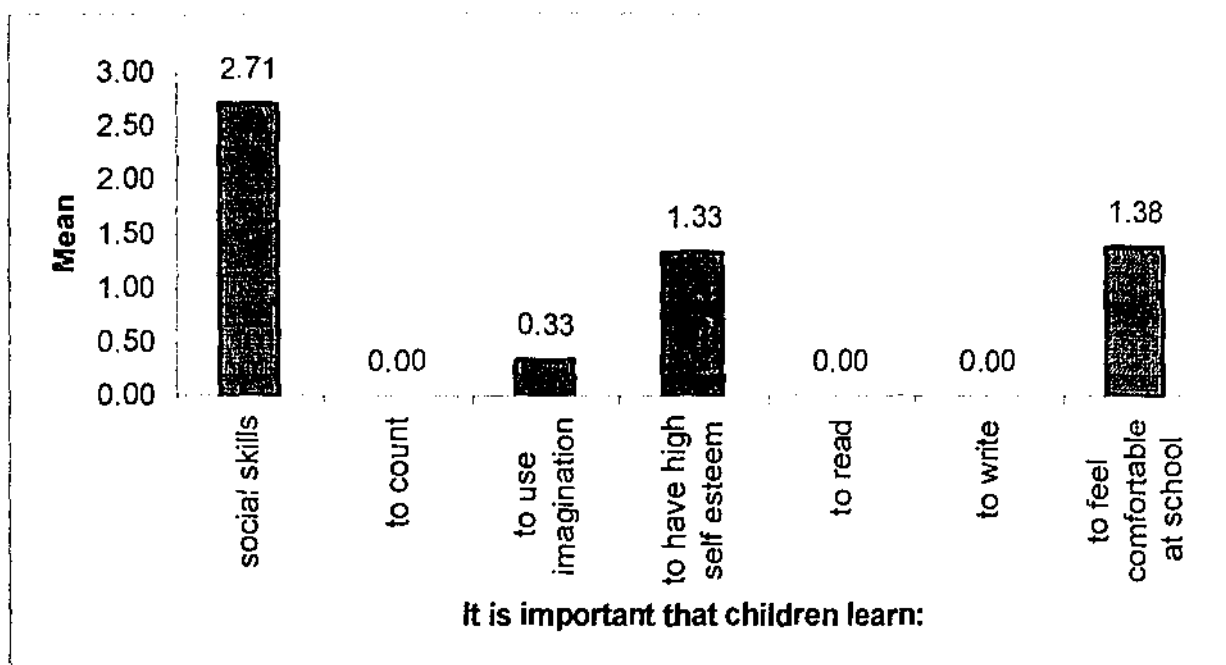


Figure 5:4 - What year one teachers think is most important for children to learn at pre-primary.

Other comments:

- fine/ gross motor skills
- independence – I would like to see children entering year one able to unpack and pack school bags without mother’s constant assistance and looking after own personal property hats, cardigans and any personal property. I have found the more dependence on parent the less initiative and risk taking in year one.
- oral language, fine and gross motor skills

The responses of year one teachers closely correlated with those of parents and pre-primary teachers. All ranked social skills as the most important thing for children to learn at pre-primary. All groups ranked feeling comfortable at school next in importance, followed by having high self-esteem. Learning to use imagination was given a low importance rating along with the more formal skills of counting, reading and writing.

Question 4 – Please Choose The 6 Most Important Activities that you Think Children Should Participate in During Pre-Primary. (Rank 1-6, where 6=most important.)

Parents and teachers were asked to rate different activities according to their importance in a pre-primary class. The twelve activities chosen were listed randomly but contained six activities which were teacher-initiated activities and six which were child-initiated activities. When the results of this question were analysed the activities were sorted and analysed according to the categories of child- or teacher-initiated.

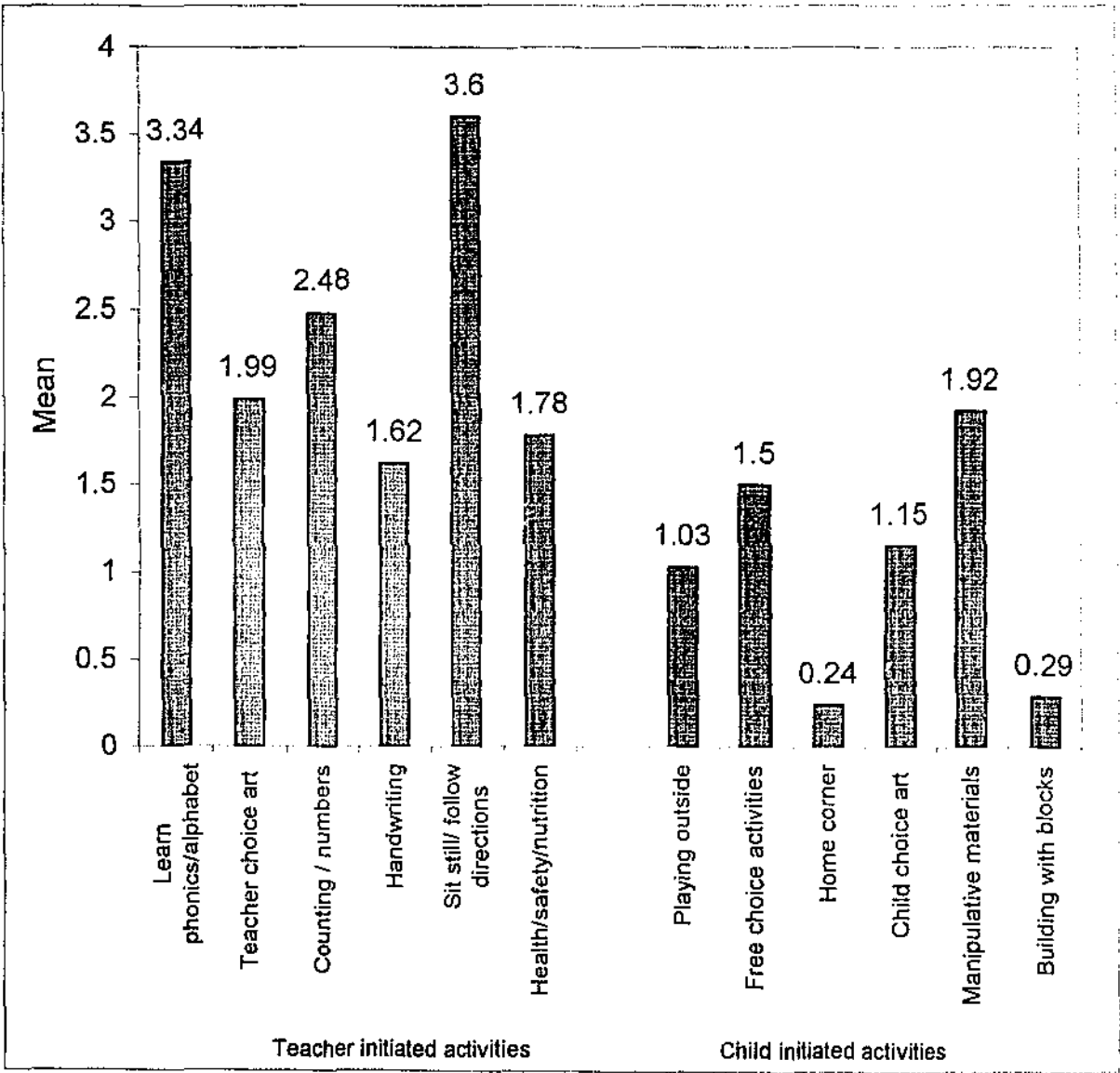


Figure 5:5 Activities parents think are most important for children to participate in during pre-primary.

Other comments:

- responsibility for self ie dressing, hygiene
- listening and concrete experiences
- early identification of potential behavioural and learning difficulties
- playing with other children
- learning about environment
- learning to participate in classroom environment
- strong discipline in right and wrong group behaviour
- social skills
- learning to cooperate with peers
- to know and understand a rule is a rule and is not to be broken

Figure 5:5 shows the responses of parents skewed in favour of teacher initiated activities. The teacher initiated activities are more aligned to traditional year one programs, for example learning phonics and the alphabet; sitting still and following directions; and counting and numbers. This is very interesting in light of the earlier parent responses which reported that parents did not think that reading, writing and counting were as important as learning social skills in the pre-primary program.

Parents stressed the importance of children enjoying pre-primary as a transition year and developing their social skills in a fun way, for example, one parent wrote:

I believe pre-primary should be a safe and positive transition from home to an institution instead of trying to formalise the vast amount of skills, knowledge

necessary to survive! Year 1 is soon enough to begin the long process. Pre-primary should be a year of learning through play.³

Other parents advocated a more formal start in pre-primary. For example, one parent wrote:

Less free playing time, more constructive play. Most children have blocks and sandpits at home to play with. Teach them something that they need to learn eg learning to read clocks, alphabet etc.⁴

The contradictory nature of these views may be more clearly understood in light of Hewitt's (1997) analysis of actualised and idealised perceptions. Parents 'ideally' want their children to be prepared for year one by developing social skills; having high self-esteem; and feeling comfortable at school. Simultaneously, parents 'actually' want their child to have the basic skills: - to sit still and follow directions; to learn the alphabet; and the basics of reading, math and writing.

³ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

⁴ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

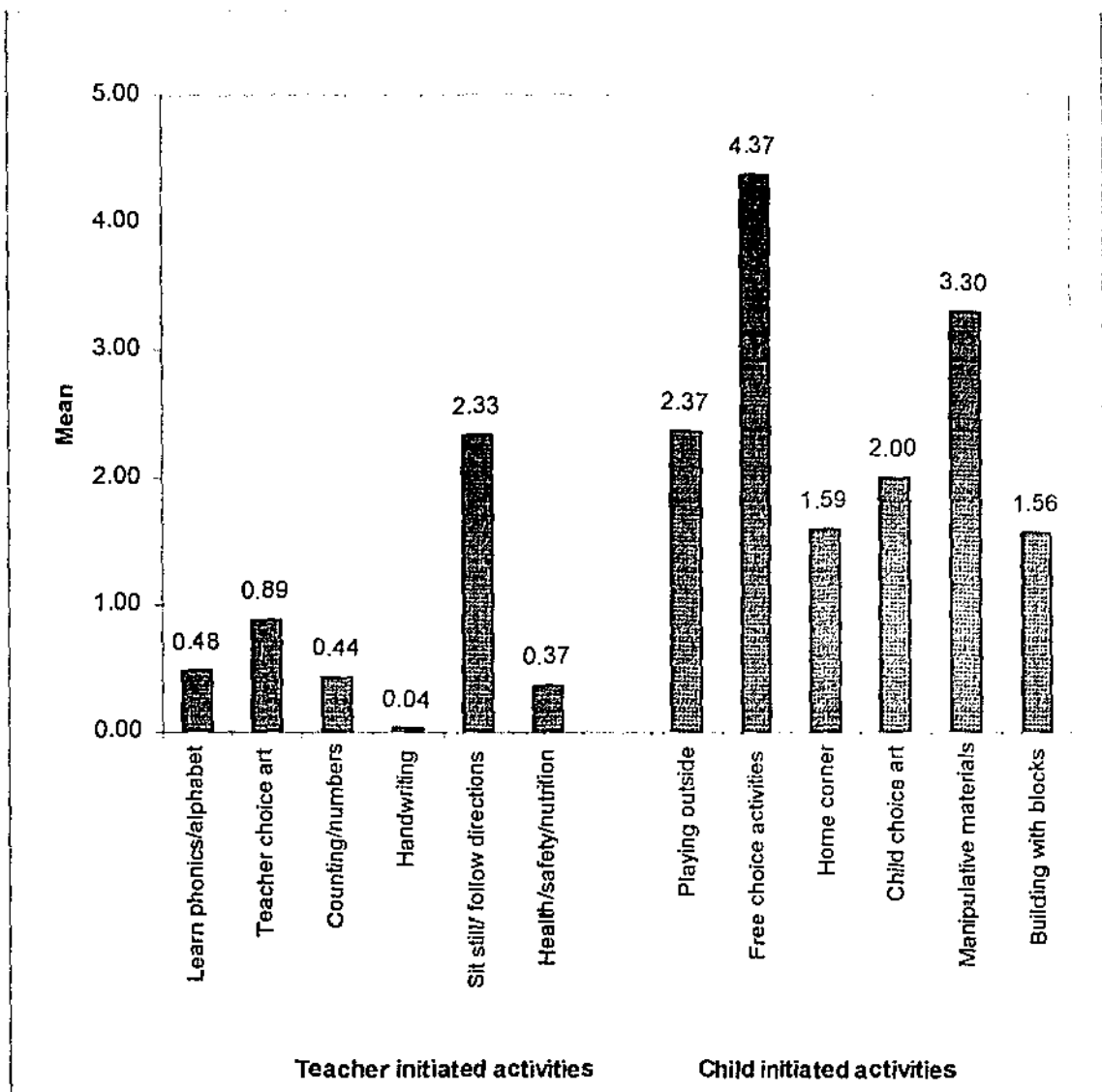


Figure 5:6. Activities pre-primary teachers think are most important for children to participate in during pre-primary.

Other comments:

- becoming a cooperative player and worker
- learning social skills
- music & movement
- language experience / whole language activities
- cooperative play in learning centres
- activities which focus on development of problem solving skills and independent thinking
- activities which foster listening and discrimination skills

- participating in activities as directed by the teacher
- participating in activities initiated by the child

Results show that pre-primary teachers supported child initiated activities in pre-primary (Figure 5:6). The pre-primary teachers' responses differed significantly to those of the parents. The choice of activities reflected a more developmentally appropriate curriculum, according to the NAEYC's (1987) guidelines, for pre-primary than the parents' choice of activities.

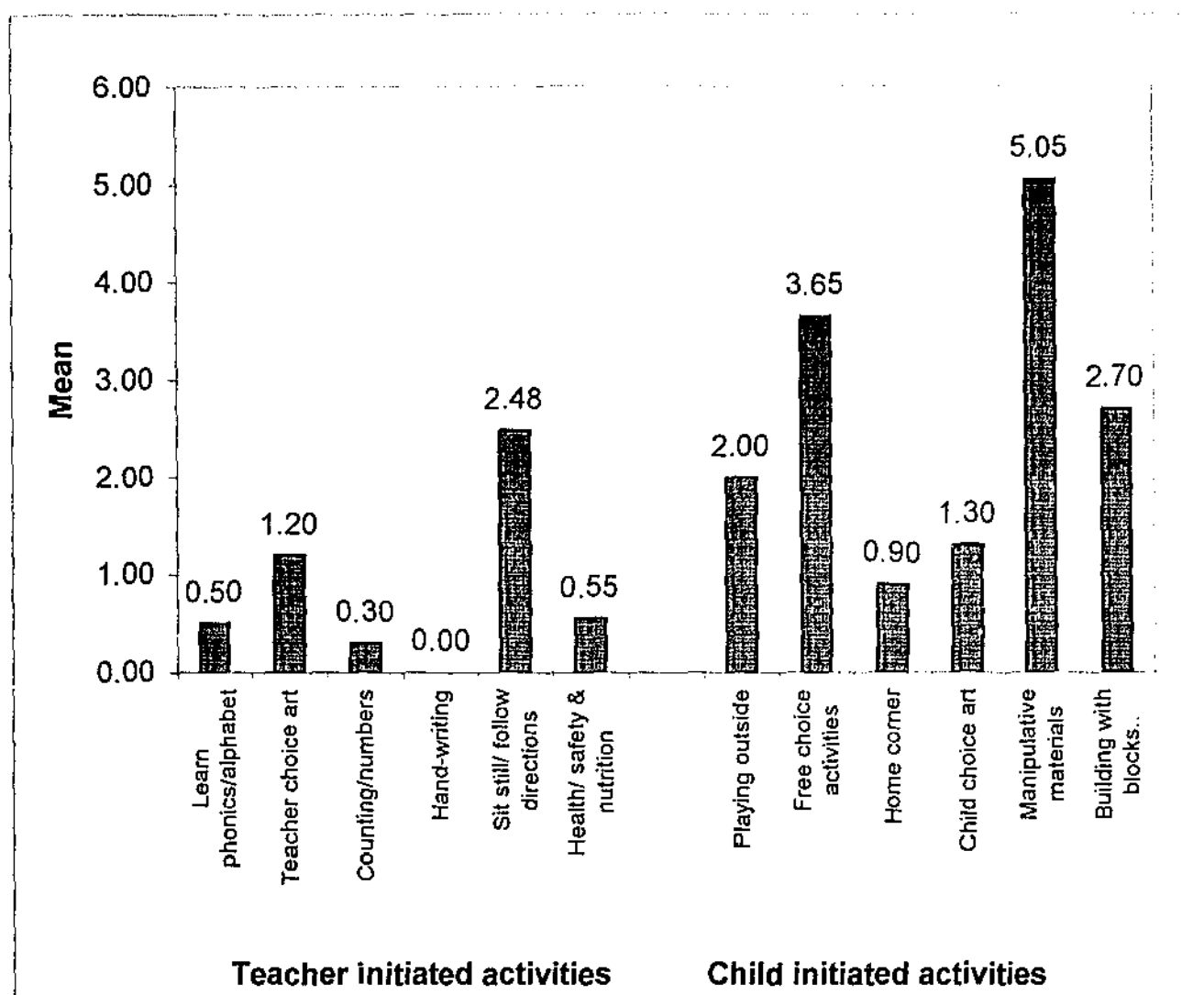


Figure 5:7 Activities year one teachers think are most important for children to participate in during pre-primary.

Other comments:

- oral language and listening activities
- working cooperatively as a group member
- learning to cooperate and work in a group

Once again the responses of both groups of teachers are similar. Pre-primary teachers gave slightly more priority to free choice activities; the home corner; and art activities initiated by the child, while year one teachers gave slightly higher priority to the use of manipulative materials and building with blocks (mean difference 0.6 or greater). Both groups reported a preference for child initiated activities.

Table 5:4

Comparison of means – child initiated v teacher initiated activities.

Activity	Respondent	Mean	Std dev	Number
Child initiated	Parent	6.13*	5.04	123
	Teacher	15.36*	5.03	47
Teacher initiated	Parent	14.81#	4.95	123
	Teacher	4.68#	4.02	47

* Means differ significantly ($t(168) = 10.687, P < 0.001$).

Means differ significantly ($t(168) = 12.531, P < 0.001$).

The views of parents and teachers differed significantly on this question. Parents identified the teacher initiated activities as significantly more important than the child initiated ones. Both the pre-primary and year one teachers suggest the opposite, ranking child initiated activities higher overall than teacher initiated activities. The comparison of means (Table 5:4) shows a significant difference between the parents' and teachers' responses.

Question 5 – What do you see as the Main Purpose of Pre-Primary for Children?

Table 5:5

Main purposes of pre-primary – the views of parents and teachers.

Purposes	Parents	Pre-primary teachers	Year one teachers
Social skills	43.0%	53.3%	73.9%
Preparation for year one	63.4%	13.3%	30.4%
Positive attitude to learning	-	23.3%	-
Develop fine/gross motor	-	20.0%	21.7%
To have fun	20.8%	10.0%	4.3%
Develop confidence	6.4%	16.6%	-
Develop high self esteem	3.2%	13.3%	4.3%
Reach optimum level	-	13.3%	-
Reading / the alphabet	10.5%	-	4.3%
Writing	10.5%	-	-
Sit still/follow directions	10.5%	3.3%	8.7%

Note: Responses included if the maximum frequency was 10% or greater.

Both parents and teachers identified social skills as one of the main purposes of pre-primary, parents only identifying preparation for year one as a more important purpose. The next highest ranked purpose identified by both parents and teachers was to have fun. The more formal skills, such as reading/the alphabet; writing; and sitting still and following directions were given the lowest ratings again.

Question 6 – What Skills do you Think are Most Important for Children to Have When
they Begin Year One?

Table 5:6

Skills children need when they begin year one – the views of parents and teachers.

Skill	Parents	Pre-primary teachers	Year one teachers
Social skills	48.0%	60.0%	56.5%
Reading / the alphabet	48.8%	6.6%	8.7%
Fine/ gross motor skills	5.6%	30.0%	43.4%
Listening	19.2%	33.3%	43.4%
Math	42.4%	6.6%	8.7%
Confidence	17.6%	36.6%	26%
Sit still/ follow directions	32.0%	26.6%	30.4%
Writing	30.4%	-	-
Independence	5.6%	16.6%	26%
Communicate with others	7.2%	23.3%	13%
Write name/ handwriting	8.8%	3.3%	21.7%
Self esteem	8.8%	16.6%	8.7%
Interest in learning	8%	16.6%	4.3%
Concentration	3.2%	10%	-
Problem solving	-	10%	-

Note: Responses included if maximum frequency was 10% or greater.

Interestingly in Table 5:6 parents identified both social skills and formal skills as important when children begin year one. Earlier it was noted that parents thought social skills were most important for children to learn in pre-primary and that formal skills were unimportant (Figure 5:2). However, when children begin year one, parents want them to have reading (48.8%), writing (30.4%) and math (42.4%) skills. It would appear that parents see year one as a much more formal year than pre-primary as this parent explains:

Year 1 is soon enough to begin the long process. Pre-primary should be a year of learning through play.⁵

Other parents indicated that formal skills should be taught a little earlier in pre-primary so that year one would not be such a big shock.

I would like the children to read and write in Term 4 – just a little – not much – Just so it isn't a real shock for Grade 1 – I think pre-primary and grade 1 is a big step!⁶

The pre-primary's should start teaching basics read, write more, writing, maths early on through the year so some kids get the grasp of it before moving onto grade one.⁷

Teachers gave fairly similar responses regarding requirements for entry into year one. The four most important skills identified by pre-primary teachers were social skills, confidence, listening and fine/gross motor skills. Year one teachers identified social skills, fine/gross motor, listening and sitting still and following directions as their four

⁵ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

⁶ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

⁷ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

most important skill requirements. The only significant differences were that year one teachers appear to place greater emphasis on independence and writing their name/ handwriting. The issue of handwriting and fine motor skills created the most significant difference between the results of pre-primary and year one teachers as the following comments by year one teachers demonstrate:

Correct pencil grip should be introduced and encouraged if children are writing. Correct letter formations should be shown and encouraged (expected?) when children write names – or in any appropriate learning situation.⁸

If pre-primaries are going to teach letter formations & encourage more writing they should ensure children learn correct pencil grip/ formations.⁹

The issue for year one teachers appears to be not that handwriting should be taught but that if pre-primary teachers are going to teach it they should ensure correct instruction. This is perhaps emphasised in Figure 5:7 when year one teachers attributed a mean score of 0 to handwriting but the use of manipulative materials was given a mean score of 5.05 (the highest ranked activity).

⁸ Year one teacher's General Comments - Appendix C

⁹ Year one teacher's General Comments - Appendix C

Question 7 – What do you Think is Important to Know About your Child’s Progress at the End of the Year? Rank 1-3, Where 3=Most Important. (Parents Only)

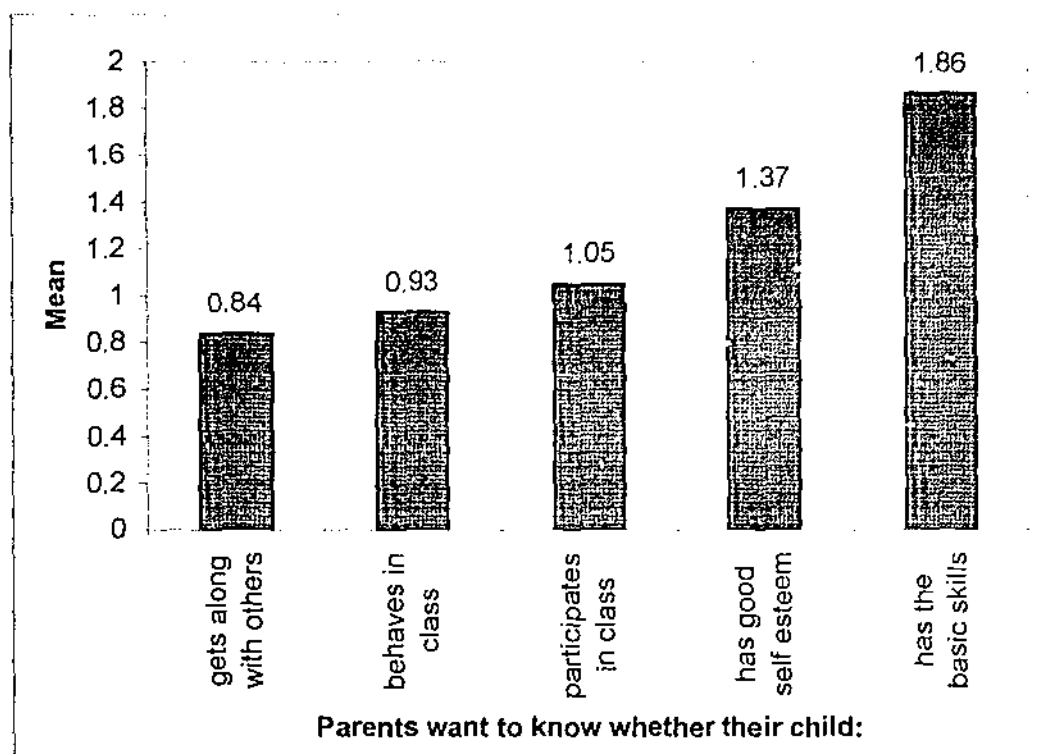


Figure 5:8 What parents want to know about their child’s progress at the end of the year.

Although in earlier sections of the questionnaire (Figure 5:2 and Table 5:5) parents identified social skills as a very important part of the pre-primary program they are least concerned about knowing about their child’s social development at the end of the year. Instead, parents wanted to know whether their child had the basic skills. This is perhaps due to the parents’ perceived need for more formal skills in year one, as discussed earlier.

Question 8 – How Satisfied are you With the Current Pre-Primary Program in Western
Australia?

Table 5:7
Parents' and teachers' satisfaction ratings of the current pre-primary program in
Western Australia.

Respondent	Mean
Parents	4.09
Pre-primary teachers	3.55
Year one teachers	3.61

On a rating scale from 1(very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) both parents and teachers indicated an overall satisfaction with the current pre-primary program offered in Western Australia. Teachers indicated a lower satisfaction level than parents.

General Comments

Question 9 – Is There Anything Else you Would Like to Comment on About the Current Pre-Primary Program Offered in Western Australia?

Parents

Table 5:8

Classification of parents' general comments.

Category of response	Percentage
Formalisation of pre-primary	17.6%
Expressions of satisfaction	13.6%
Entry age or length of program concerns	8.8%
The teacher is the key	8.0%
Expressions of dissatisfaction	5.6%
Multi-age groupings	4.0%
Communicating to parents	3.2%

Formalisation of pre-primary.

Twenty-two parents mentioned the formalisation of the pre-primary program and 18 wanted the program to be more formal. The reasons given for the desired increase in formalisation were: prepares children better for year one; caters for more able children; and the full day program giving more time for formal learning. One parent commented:

I only feel the kids need to learn the alphabet and numbers as they are full time and therefore have more time for school work, but otherwise if they were only doing ½ days my expectations would be different.¹⁰

¹⁰ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

Expressions of satisfaction.

The general comments that expressed satisfaction with the pre-primary program, primarily discussed the school they were directly involved in and seemed particularly happy with: catering for individuality of students; and preparation for year one.

Entry age or length of program concerns.

The entry age and length of program concerns proved a contentious issue. Eleven parents commented on this issue: eight parents wanted children to start later or more slowly and three wanted them to start earlier. The extremeness of parents' views on this issue are highlighted in the following comments:

I feel full time pre-primary is not necessary and basically a baby-sitting service. Our children have enough schooling without sending them full time when they are only 4.¹¹

I am glad to see that a 4 yrs old program is now starting, as I think school starts at an age that is too high.¹²

The teacher is the key.

An earlier question highlighted the teacher as the most important source of information for parents. The parents' general comments also suggest that parents think the success of the program relies on the teacher. As one parent writes:

I think the most important aspect in pre-primary is the teacher. You may have the best programs to offer but it will all fall apart if the teacher isn't right¹³.

¹¹ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

¹² Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

¹³ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

Expressions of dissatisfaction.

Expressions of dissatisfaction dealt with varied issues ranging from segregating Aboriginal children to more consideration for working mothers, however one issue arose three times: - involvement with the primary school. One parent wanted more involvement with the primary school whilst two others thought that assemblies and sports carnivals were best left for the older children.

Multi-age groupings.

Most of these comments dealt with the integration of 4 and 5 year olds in one class. All (4) responses were against this formation. The other comment was also against multi-age groupings but in this case – 5 and 6-year-old groupings. The primary concerns were about one age group missing out on teacher time and the disruption caused by combining two age groups.

Communicating to parents.

Four parents felt that not enough information was given to parents about:

..why activities are done, what they are learning & how children learn, & that children learn through playing.¹⁴

¹⁴ Parent's General Comments - Appendix C

Pre-primary Teachers

Table 5:9

Classification of pre-primary teachers' general comments.

Category of response	Percentage
Formalisation of pre-primary	50.0%
Expression of dissatisfaction	26.6%
Entry age and length of program	16.6%
Multi-age grouping	6.6%
Class sizes	3.3%
Expression of satisfaction	3.3%
The teacher is the key	3.3%

Formalisation of pre-primary.

The move to formalise the pre-primary program is a concern to many of the pre-primary teachers as half of them wrote about this in their general comments. Pre-primary teachers identified many reasons for the increasing pressure to formalise programs as these excerpts show:

There appears to be increasing pressure from parents in WA.

The new emphasis on outcomes based education, evaluation & accountability is not terribly compatible with education of PP aged children.

It seems many teachers are introducing formal reading/writing programs when they go full day. It seems they don't know what to do with the extra couple of hours.¹⁵

¹⁵ Pre-primary teacher's General Comments - Appendix C

Expression of dissatisfaction.

Pre-primary teachers appear to be dissatisfied with a perceived lack of consistency across pre-primary programs.

Some consistency across the state regards curriculum is needed.¹⁶

Other concerns raised were, the size and use of buildings:

The size of buildings according to numbers of children – and the expectation of use of these buildings – is something to be concerned about for the future.

Classroom sizes & yard sizes decreasing in new schools due to lack of funds in govt schools.¹⁷

and the lack of funding for, early intervention; more teacher assistant time in year one classes; and buildings for 4 year old classes.

Entry age and length of program.

Five teachers commented on the length of the program. The majority felt that 5 full days for pre-primary would be too much.

Multi-age grouping.

Only two teachers commented on this issue, one feeling very unsure about the rapid introduction of P -1 classes and the other concerned that combining 4 and 5 year olds for the purpose of maximisation is inappropriate.

Class sizes.

One teacher commented that class sizes need reduction.

¹⁶ Pre-primary teacher's General Comments - Appendix C

¹⁷ Pre-primary teacher's General Comments - Appendix C

Expression of satisfaction.

One teacher commented that full time pre-primary increases opportunity to provide children with a developmentally appropriate program.

The teacher is the key.

One teacher commented on the importance of the teacher to the program's success.

Year one Teachers

Table 5:10

Classification of year one teachers' general comments.

Category of response	Percentage
Formalisation of pre-primary	39.1%
Consistency across programs	8.6%
Handwriting	8.6%
Expression of dissatisfaction	4.3%
Multi-age grouping	4.3%
Reporting to parents	4.3%
The teacher is the key	4.3%

Formalisation of pre-primary.

Seven out of nine teachers who commented on the formalisation of the pre-primary program thought that the program is getting too formal. The primary reason given for the formalisation of the program was the move from part-time pre-primary to full-time pre-primary.

Full time pre-primary should mean that teachers get more time to work on the same skills NOT to be running a watered down year one programme.¹⁸

Consistency across programs.

Two teachers expressed concern that children attending different pre-primaries were receiving very different programs and that some measure of consistency should be introduced.

Handwriting.

Two year one teachers raised concerns over the teaching of fine motor skills and letter formations in pre-primary.

Expression of dissatisfaction.

One teacher expressed disappointment with the quality of the language program in pre-primary.

Multi-age grouping.

One teacher was concerned that to teach pre-primary a teacher must have an early childhood qualification but to teach a P-1 class you need no such qualification and will not have a full time assistant.

Reporting to parents.

One year one teacher commented that more accountability is required now that 5 year olds attend school full time.

¹⁸ Year one teacher's General Comments - Appendix C
80

The teacher is the key.

One teacher noted that the success of the program depends upon the teacher and their beliefs.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This study sought to identify what parents and teachers think children should learn and experience at pre-primary. The results of this study clarify what parents and pre-primary and year one teachers value in the early childhood curriculum, and inferences can be made about the type of pedagogy that the stakeholders prefer to see enacted. In addition, inferences can be made about the type of knowledge that is socially constructed and the level of collaboration between the stakeholders.

Historically many purposes have existed for pre-primary education. The most recent trend in pre-primary education has been the move towards a more academic curriculum. Research in this area has identified many possible reasons for this trend including the suggestion that parents are a possible source of pressure (Elkind, 1986; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Richman & Rescorla, 1995), and the findings of the current study support this.

This chapter will discuss the results and implications of the current study and conclusions will be drawn.

Social Construction of Knowledge

In the 1980s Elkind (1986) suggested that, “educational practice is determined by economic, political and social considerations” (p.632). The current study is primarily concerned with the social considerations determining educational practice and most particularly the social collaboration between parents and teachers.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is worthy of consideration at this point. Parents and teachers (both pre-primary and year one) are likely to come from various educational and social backgrounds. The views they have formed about the education of 5-year-old children are likely to be primarily shaped as a result of the interactions within their social groups and educational experience. These social systems have contributed to the views adopted by the parents and teachers involved in this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that interactions between the home-school mesosystem have the power to positively or negatively affect the child.

Vygotskian theory also suggests a social development of knowledge as humans interact with each other. Teachers and parents who collaborate and share knowledge are more able to identify a child's zone of proximal development and scaffold a child's learning appropriately. Adults interacting in this way may be involved in similar processes as they collaborate and scaffold each other's learning about the child and about the way children learn. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that individuals acquire knowledge and skills valued by their culture. The skills and knowledge valued at home and at school may differ significantly so links between the two institutions must be facilitated through the collaboration of the family and the school.

At the beginning of this study, it was assumed that parents, pre-primary teachers and year one teachers construct different views of the pre-primary curriculum. The results do not support this hypothesis. Pre-primary and year one teachers were found to have almost identical views on the content and learning experiences in the pre-primary program. Parents shared the teachers' views on the importance of the social domain in

pre-primary, however parents and teachers differed significantly in their views about the content of the pre-primary curriculum.

Formalisation of the Pre-primary Program

Discussion about curriculum escalation has emerged over the last few decades and many researchers and associations have warned against the possible negative effects of such a curriculum on young children (Bredekamp, 1997; Elkind, 1993). NAEYC's "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" (DAP) established and documented primarily in the United States of America (Hoot, Parmar, Hujala-Huttunen, Cao & Chacon, 1996) has been used for more than a decade as a benchmark for good practice in early childhood education in Australia. In this study DAP is used as a guide to good practice, together with the principles articulated in the Education Department of Western Australia's Statement for Schools and Communities on the Education of Children 3-8 Years (Tayler, 1998).

It was hypothesised at the onset of this study, that both parents and year one teachers were applying pressure to bring the traditional year one curriculum into the pre-primary. However, the results showed more similarities than differences between year one and pre-primary teachers, and identified parents as the primary source of pressure to formalise the curriculum, although the views of parents did not differ entirely from those of the teachers. In fact parents and teachers both strongly identified the social domain as an important developmental concern for pre-primary aged children. The difference between parents' and teachers' views became apparent when both groups were asked what activities were important in the pre-primary curriculum. Parents chose

those activities more traditionally aligned with year one programs, such as sitting still and following directions; learning phonics and the alphabet; and learning counting and numbers. Teachers identified activities closely aligned with developmentally appropriate practice, such as the use of manipulative materials; free choice activities; and block building. The findings of the current study are consistent with studies in various contexts that have shown that parents desire more formal elements in programs for pre-primary children (Hewitt, 1998; Webster & Wood, 1986). Brewer & Kieff (1997) and Rothlein & Brett, (1987) found that parents do not value play as a strategy in early childhood classrooms, and therefore, would not value traditional pre-primary activities, such as the home corner or block corner.

As previously mentioned, Hewitt's (1998) comparison of actualised and idealised perceptions is useful in this study. The current study found that parents ideally wanted their child to develop social skills, have a high self esteem and be prepared for year one as a result of participation in a pre-primary program. Concurrently, the parents actually want their child to have the basic skills of reading writing and mathematics that they consider will better prepare them for year one.

The Role of the Early Childhood Teacher

Linek, Rasinski & Harkins (1997) studied teachers' perceptions of parent involvement in a reading program and found that 90% of teachers thought parent involvement was important or very important and yet only 65.6% currently had parents involved in their reading programs. Teachers, as with many other professionals, store away much tacit knowledge about "students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught"

(Kagan, 1992, p. 65), however it is not well documented how well this tacit knowledge is translated into practice. It seems that teachers know that parents are important to the school curriculum but in practice do not involve them to any great extent (Linek et al, 1997). Teachers may feel that the purpose of various activities is obvious, however to a parent, who does not share the same background knowledge, the purpose of many activities may be unnoticed or undervalued.

Ebbeck (1991) explains that parents who do not share a common understanding of the philosophy of the program will become dissatisfied with education in general. The results of the current study demonstrate that parents do not share the teachers' understandings of a developmentally appropriate program. As previously mentioned the teacher is the primary source of information for parents and is therefore the best candidate for determining the parents' understandings and reaffirming or expanding their knowledge of sound educational practices for young children. Pelander (1997) identified the benefits of children participating in a developmentally appropriate program but more importantly identified three recommendations for practitioners: - stay informed; collaborate with colleagues; and keep parents informed. The implications for early childhood teachers are clear. It is important for teachers to become aware of the tacit knowledge that is driving their decision-making processes. One way for tacit knowledge to become explicit is for teachers to engage with parents and staff and have serious conversations about the aims and goals of the pre-primary curriculum. Teachers must be prepared to listen to parents and encourage them to articulate their hopes and aspirations for their children and their fears and concerns. Listening to parents will help to know how to explain the purposes of the child-initiated curriculum; the learning involved in play; and the value of children's problem solving, enquiry and collaborative

work in small groups. Teachers can advise parents of the language development that occurs in play-based learning and the links to literacy development.

The Negotiated Curriculum

The purpose of this research was to identify the views of primary stakeholders in the education of pre-primary children. The findings of this study identify significant differences between the views of these stakeholders, which leads to the recommendation that processes be established to create opportunity for collaboration and the development of a negotiated curriculum. Hewitt (1998) argues that 'educating' parents about appropriateness denies their right to become involved in decisions regarding their child's education. Parents need not be 'educated'. The development of a shared understanding between parents and teachers about the goals of a program is more likely to be supported than a program that is forced upon the parents.

A need exists for parents to become involved in programs and to enhance their knowledge of developmentally appropriate programs (Hoot, Parmar, Hujala-Huttunen, Cao & Chacon, 1996). It is through participation and collaboration that parents will support and complement the goals of pre-primary programs. Parents are more likely to support the goals of the school if teachers respect their opinions (Fitzgerald & Goncu, 1993).

Collaboration is not an unattainable goal. After all, the results of this study indicate that parents are already aware of some elements of a developmentally appropriate program. Upon establishment of a reciprocal relationship between parents and teachers, shared

construction of knowledge about early childhood curriculum and pedagogy is the logical next step. Many teachers have strategies in place to promote the sharing of knowledge. For example, some teachers write daily or weekly 'messages' to parents, which is a valuable opportunity to promote early childhood pedagogy and good practice. The messages may take the form of a letter sent home, a blackboard set up at the pre-primary door or a message stuck on the door. Opportunities exist to communicate to parents the events occurring that day or week and to make explicit the learning inherent in these activities.

Stone (1995) urges teachers to involve parents in situations that support quality play experiences, which provide perfect opportunities to discuss the purpose and value of play in the early childhood curriculum. Spangler (1997) outlines ways to promote collaborative relationships by assigning children a special sharing day in which parents can participate. Manning, Manning & Morrison (1995) detail a letter writing activity between the teacher, the child and the parents. These are all good examples of ways to create opportunities to open the lines of communication between teachers and parents and facilitate the collaboration desired.

Conclusions

As we move into the next century, pre-primary education is likely to continue to evolve and change to suit the political, social and economic climate. Currently a perfect opportunity exists to further explore and challenge the pre-primary curriculum in light of the implementation of the Curriculum Framework Document K-12 (Education Department of WA, 1998). It is a challenge to the early childhood professional to work

with parents and their children by implementing a negotiated curriculum that is socially and contextually constructed. Collaboration between teachers and parents to provide a cohesive and negotiated curriculum for 5-year-olds is a complex proposition, but one worth further consideration. Collaboration may help stem the formalisation of the curriculum and the miseducation of young children, which is occurring in some contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research

As with much research, the current study has raised more questions than it has answered. The results have urged future consideration of many variables affecting the collaboration of parents and teachers. The following suggestions would further clarify the results of this study:

- Extending the scope of this study by enlarging the sample size and/or constraints, for example surveying private school parents and teachers to allow comparison.
- Replicating the survey in other parts of Australia or the world and comparing the results.
- Conducting interviews to clarify the results.
- Interviewing pre-primary children to complete the matrix of views in the pre-primary setting. It would also be interesting to survey teacher assistants, principals and other people directly or indirectly involved with pre-primary education.
- Comparative data could be gathered about two classrooms, one that espouses the notion of the negotiated curriculum and one that does not.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parents / Caregivers,

WHAT DO YOU THINK CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN AT PRE-PRIMARY?

I would like to know what parents really think about pre-primary education in Western Australia, as part of my post-graduate study in Education. You can help by completing the following questionnaire. It will only take a few minutes!

Your replies are completely confidential (your name is not necessary on the questionnaire). Please answer the questions as fully as possible. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Many thanks

Ann Srhoy

It is important that I get as many questionnaires back as possible!

PLEASE RETURN TO THE CLASSROOM TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL BY:

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Who is completing this questionnaire?

- ☐ Mother / Female caregiver
- ☐ Father / Male caregiver
- ☐ Both

THE PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAM

The pre-primary program refers to the activities/ experiences your child is involved in whilst enrolled in a full time 5 year old pre-primary.

2. Where do you get most of your information about the pre-primary program?

Please choose the 3 most important sources of information and rank them 1-3.

1 = most important.

- ☐ The teacher
- ☐ The teacher assistant
- ☐ Other parents
- ☐ Your child
- ☐ The school newsletter or notes
- ☐ The media (eg TV, newspaper, magazines...)
- ☐ During parent roster visits
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

3. At pre-primary I think it is most important that children learn:

(Please choose the 3 most important things and rank them 1-3, where 1 = most important)

- ☐ social skills (eg sharing, playing skills, stand up for themselves)
- ☐ to count
- ☐ to use their imagination
- ☐ to have high self esteem
- ☐ to read
- ☐ to write
- ☐ to feel comfortable in a school environment
- ☐ Others (Please specify) _____

4. Please choose the 6 most important activities that you think children should participate in during pre-primary. (Rank 1 – 6, where 1 = most important).

- ☐ Learning phonics and the alphabet
- ☐ Playing outside eg in the sandpit or on playground equipment
- ☐ Learning counting and numbers
- ☐ Choosing from a range of free choice activities
- ☐ Learning to sit still and follow directions
- ☐ Playing in the home corner
- ☐ Participating in art activities initiated by the child
- ☐ Participating in art activities as directed by the teacher
- ☐ Learning hand-writing
- ☐ Using manipulative materials such as playdough, puzzles...
- ☐ Learning about health, safety and nutrition
- ☐ Building with blocks, lego etc.
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

5. What do you see as the main purpose of pre-primary for children?

6. What skills do you think are most important for children to have when they begin year 1?

7. What do you think is important to know about your child's progress at the end of the year? (Choose the 3 most important things and rank them 1-3, where 1= most important).

Do you want to know if your child:

- ☐ Gets along with others in the class?
- ☐ Behaves well in class?
- ☐ Participates well in class activities?
- ☐ Has good self-esteem?
- ☐ Has the basic reading/ writing/ math skills?
- ☐ Other, please specify. _____

8. How satisfied are you with the current pre-primary program in Western Australia? (Please circle number).

Very unsatisfied	→	→	→	Very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

GENERAL COMMENTS

9. Is there anything else you would like to comment on about the current pre-primary program offered in Western Australia?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND FEEDBACK.

APPENDIX B

Teacher Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

**WHAT DO YOU THINK CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN IN PRE-
PRIMARY?**

I would like to know what teachers and parents think about pre-primary education in Western Australia as part of my post-graduate study in Education. You can help by completing the following questionnaire. It will only take a few minutes!

Your responses will be completely confidential. Please answer questions as fully as possible. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Many thanks

Ann Srhoy
Wanneroo Junior Primary School

It is important that I get back as many questionnaires as possible!

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO YOUR PRINCIPAL BY:

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Please indicate whether you are male or female.

☐

Female

☐

Male

2a. How many years have you been teaching?

☐

0 - 5 years

☐

6 - 10 years

☐

11 - 15 years

☐

More than 15 years.

2b. What year level are you presently teaching?

☐

Full time five year old pre-primary

☐

Year one

☐

Other, please specify, _____

THE PRE-PRIMAR Y PROGRAM

3. At pre-primary I think it is most important that children learn:

(Please choose the 3 most important things and rank them 1-3, where 1=most important.)

☐

social skills (eg sharing, playing skills, standing up for themselves..)

☐

to count

☐

to use their imagination

☐

to have high self esteem

☐

to read

☐

to write

☐

to feel comfortable in a school environment

☐

Other, please specify, _____

4. Please choose the 6 most important activities that you think children should participate in during pre-primary. (Rank 1 – 6, where 1 = most important).

- ☐ Learning phonics and the alphabet
- ☐ Playing outside eg in the sandpit or on playground equipment
- ☐ Learning counting and numbers
- ☐ Choosing from a range of free choice activities
- ☐ Learning to sit still and follow directions
- ☐ Playing in the home corner
- ☐ Participating in art activities initiated by the child
- ☐ Participating in art activities as directed by the teacher
- ☐ Learning hand-writing
- ☐ Using manipulative materials such as playdough, puzzles...
- ☐ Learning about health, safety and nutrition
- ☐ Building with blocks, lego etc
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

5. What do you see as the main purpose of pre-primary for children?

6. What skills do you think are most important for children to have when they begin Year One?

7. How satisfied are you with the current pre-primary program in Western Australia?
(Please circle number).

Very unsatisfied → → → Very satisfied

1 2 3 4 5

GENERAL COMMENTS

8. Is there anything else you would like to comment on about the current pre-primary program offered in Western Australia?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND FEEDBACK.

APPENDIX C

General Comments

PARENTS' GENERAL COMMENTS

Formalisation of pre-primary (22 comments)

More formal skills wanted

- I have based my comments on the fact that I have an extremely bright child, perhaps I would not include reading & writing skills as one of the important skills, if this was not the case.
- I have always been very happy with the pre-primary programs I have used over the last 10 years. But only since this last year have I noticed more emphasis put on reading & writing. I feel this is very important, especially for those who may be inclined to lag behind in year one. Its such an advantage if they have a basic knowledge.
- I am very happy that Letterland is being introduced in the pre-primary year. It really has helped my son to recognise the letters of the alphabet because he had no idea before Letterland.
- I think it is a good concept but could probably be improved by having a more structured and formal classroom in 4th term, ie children at desks to prepare for year one.
- I feel the pre-primary programme being provided is terrific but I would like to see some flexibility introduced, so children who are more advanced than others are catered for, especially with regard to reading. My daughter has a large number of basic sight words which she knows and would really benefit from a language extension programme. I am not unhappy at all if the children are taught as if they are all at the same stage of development academically but I do feel more forward thinking is needed so children are taught at their level during some stages of the

school day. Child X is very happy at school though and I am happy that she is happy in the end!

- The program seems to be basically good. However I feel that sometimes the program is too jam-packed with extra things. More time given over to reading, writing & listening skills would be good. Also the mobile classrooms seem to be too small for the number of children.
- I feel there is a lot more basic skills that could be covered and that most children are more than ready to participate in such learning skills particularly those born in the first six months of the year.
- I'd like to see more reading & writing instruction carried out in pre-primary.
- With children attending full day pre-primary, I feel the morning should be used for academic learning, (letters, numbers etc) and the afternoon should be for free-play or similar. They currently appear to have a large amount of "play" time.
- I would like the children to read and write in Term 4 – just a little – not much – Just so it isn't a real shock for Grade 1 – I think pre-primary and grade 1 is a big step!
- Less free playing time, more constructive play. Most children have blocks and sandpits at home to play with. Teach them something that they need to learn eg learning to read a clock, alphabet etc..
- The pre-primary's should start teaching basics read, writing, maths early on through the year so some kids get the grasp of it before moving onto grade one.
- I think children should learn read and write more, recognise letters, colours etc.. Have a good self esteem and be used to a school environment and learn to stand up for themselves.
- I know that the teachers are very busy but I do think a little more time could be spent showing the children how to correctly write letters.

- A little more teaching of writing letters and numbers.
- When a child shows that they are ready to go further eg they are ready to learn to read, I feel that they are being held back with the reason that they will only be bored when they get to grade 1, if they are given the opportunity to go ahead.
- I believe that a lot of activities are too similar to kindy with little encouragement given to students who are able to write & want to grow but need assistance to get them going.
- I don't feel pre-primary should be full time. It is too much for the kids who are still tired ½ way through the year. I only feel the kids need to learn the alphabet and numbers as they are full time and therefore have more time for school work, but otherwise if they were only doing ½ days my expectations would be different.
(Also my choices of 3 most important things.)

Less formal skills wanted

- I believe pre-primary should be a safe & positive transition from home to an institution instead of trying to formalize the vast amount of skills, knowledge necessary to survive! Year 1 is soon enough to begin the long process. Pre-primary should be a year of learning through play.
- Sometimes I feel too much is in the program (therefore being a bit rushed). Pre-primary should be fun! Principally learning should be through play.
- I feel as a parent, it is important to remember that at 5 the world is exciting & stimulating. I feel it is the pre-primary role to explore the senses & hone in on the unique way that 5's see the world. I feel that formal skills should be kept to a minimum especially the form of handwriting and how a child holds his/her pencil or forms letters. Surely it is wonderful enough to write without worrying about "flicks!" I refer to the Victorian Cursive style, which I feel is very confusing to the

small child as there is no other print that looks like V.C. in any stories or posters etc..

- I don't think pre-primary should become a formal learning experience but a place where children can learn the basic skills to help them cope with school. I don't want to see pre-primary as just another year at school but more a simple, fun starting place.

Expressions of satisfaction (17 comments)

- I am very happy with the program that is being offered to my child.
- From what I've seen so far regarding activities and experiences learnt through the pre-primary programme I am very pleased. I think children of the age group 4-5 years would greatly benefit from pre-primary in preparation for year 1.
- I am very pleased with the pre-primary centre at School X (school name removed) as I have had 3 children go there and they have all enjoyed themselves and learnt the skills that are required for grade 1.
- I feel that pre-primary doesn't rate much respect from the rest of primary because it is not an assessable age group in numbers ie students are not graded. And yet if pre-primary is not conducted successfully in preparing students for learning grade 1,2,3 will have a real hard time of teaching (even longer effects sometimes).
- From what I have seen, I believe young children today are given more credit for being able to absorb & understand information and then use it in relevant circumstances & settings than in previous times. I think they are treated more in a way that is relevant to the time they are growing up in. Unfortunately, the relative individuality that seems to be fostered in pre-primary tends to be eroded as the child reaches higher levels of schooling.

- Student X (name removed) is my first child to enter into the pre-primary program so I can't compare it. I only can say that out of 10 he gives it 11! If he's happy, I'm happy.
- Pre-primary is essential for all five year old children which should always be well resourced.
- It allows for the individuality of its students & recognises their different rates of progress & different areas of skill.
- Very happy. In particular happy with work being done on a one on one basis with children.
- Basically I am very happy with the program. My child is very happy at school & is seemingly coping very well. I also really enjoy the parent participation on roster.
- All of my children have loved their pre-primary time & therefore I don't think that I would change too much.
- I have only been in contact with the PP system since Feb 97. We come from NSW which does not offer this system to children prior to commencing school. I think it is fabulous to get the children used to the discipline & routines of school life as it can be very dramatic change in lifestyle & behaviour for some children.
- It has been a pleasure to be involved in my child's pre-primary year. I have nothing but praise for the programme at school X (school name removed) and feel all my child's needs have been met. I think it is a shame so many of the mothers work as they and their children really miss out by not being involved at a real personal level.
- I think the present program is an excellent one.
- I can only comment on School X in WA. I am most satisfied with the high quality of education taught & the way the children are taught to have high self esteem &

great socialization skills. From my experience with 2 children they are totally prepared for year 1 in all possible ways.

- I feel teachers do a fantastic job with the children and was quite surprised with the amount of work they do get through. The level of work is outstanding. I would like to see the occasional excursion as a break in the program and to enhance learning!
- I think the pre-primary program is a great introduction for 5 yr olds into primary school.

Entry age or length of program concerns (11 comments)

Want children to be older before they start pre-primary or kindy

- Why did EDWA bring in 4 full days of school when many children at this stage are only 4 years old till mid or late 97? Too much, too soon!
- I was not impressed with my daughter's pre-primary year. I felt she participated in a much more structured and beneficial 4-year-old programme. Her last term was great, she was prepared well for grade one by the relief teacher. I feel full time pre-primary is not necessary and basically a baby-sitting service. Our children have enough schooling without sending them full time when they are only 4.
- I don't feel pre-primary should be full time. It is too much for the kids who are still tired ½ way through the year. I only feel the kids need to learn the alphabet and numbers as they are full time and therefore have more time for school work, but otherwise if they were only doing ½ days my expectations would be different.

(Also my choices of 3 most important things.)

- I feel that the correct entry age for children to be able to attend pre-primary should be higher – possibly 4 years and six months.
- I believe that 4 full days is adequate & a good time frame for this age group.

However I question the need to do another time frame introduction in Year 1- &

would recommend that full-time pre-primary children of 1997 begin with 5 full days in Yr 1 as I believe they have been adequately prepared & expect to be attending full time Yr1. Children who turn 5 after July should wait until the following year to attend as I don't believe they are developmentally ready to grasp some of the concepts required to give them confidence in their learning abilities. Difficulties then seem to surface more in yrs 2,3 & 4 – which could be avoided if the child were to begin school later.

- I think that there should be two intakes per year according to age. As my child is one of the oldest in her class (in some cases as much as 12 months).
- I feel the children should turn five years old before they start their pre-primary year.

Want children to start kindy or pre-primary earlier

- I am glad to see that a 4 yrs old program is now starting, as I think school starts at an age that is too high. But the program is great and the teacher and her aid do a very good job. It is nice to see the children enjoy school.
- As far as my experience goes with the Australian education system which isn't very far, everything has been very satisfactory, although I consider the age for starting pre-primary is too old. English pre-primary starts at the age they turn 4 years old!
- I find school very rewarding for my 5 year old but can't understand why he only attends four days a week. I feel schooling should be the same in all states of Australia, so that if a move is made a child won't be disadvantaged from one school to the next.

Want changes to program length

- Would be happy to be part time for at least the 1st half of the year. Moving to full time by the end of the year. There is too much time for free play.

The teacher is the key (10 comments)

- I can't praise Mrs X (name removed) at School X (school name removed) enough. I have an older child who never received anything like the quality of teaching my youngest does. He looks forward to going and is upset if he has to miss school when sick. She does that little extra that counts!
- I think the most important aspect in pre-primary is the teacher. You may have the best programs to offer but it will fall apart if the teacher isn't right. I'm glad to say that my children's teacher is excellent.
- I did not answer Q.8 since I don't know the current pre-primary program in WA. I know it varies from school to school, and depends on the teacher.
- All in all I am very happy with the current program. Building a child's confidence is important for them to be happy, which in turn helps them to cope with their new life. The above really does depend on the teachers!
- As with all programs offered by the Ed. Dept they are greatly affected by the teacher, his/her interpretations and presentation of the program.
- I am very satisfied with the program offered to my child. This has a great deal to do with the teacher who has implemented an excellent program. The children love coming to pre-primary and have grown in confidence and capability since the start of the year.
- Obviously the program success depends upon the teacher's skills. I have now had exposure to the program at School X and School Y (school names removed) with the latter being far more comprehensive. This will give my son an excellent kick start as opposed to my daughter's slow start. More information on parent direction, to help nurture learning & transition skills.

- The program depends greatly on the teacher. If you have a good organised teacher that tries to prepare child for school. My child was a December child and because of this we did 2 years of preschool at different centres. They were worlds apart. Although most of same concepts taught. Results also huge difference. I can only put this down to the teacher, age difference and full time / part time.
- More teachers like Mrs X and Miss Y (names removed). Have experienced a different amount of teachers at the school and both my children talk freely about the two ladies mentioned above.
- I find that it varies so much with the individual teachers that it is very hard to make a comparison. I feel my son has had a fantastic start to his schooling in comparison to my 2 older children and that is mainly due to his great teacher.

Expressions of dissatisfaction (7 comments)

- Working mothers must be taken into consideration and hopefully more notice should be given when preparing for various school activities.
- I think pre-primary children should be more involved with the school.
- I believe social skills & manners are extremely important. I would like that to be incorporated more!
- My opinion, every child should be able to write their name by the end of year, in some form.
- In one pre-primary (4 year old) that I know of (maybe others??) aboriginal children are segregated from others ie two classes in one centre. This disturbs me as it seems like reverse discrimination.
- I don't think there is a need to attend school assemblies for the first 2 or 3 terms. They are boring for small children & require 45 mins of sitting on cold concrete.

Also I do not think that behaviour management strategies such as time-out are appropriate for 4 & 5 year olds. I sometimes feel that some pre-primary teachers speak too loudly / sternly should not be teaching this age group.

- I feel it is unnecessary to involve pre-schoolers in faction sports & assemblies. They seem to find these overwhelming. I think basic non-competitive sport would be nice.

Multi-age groupings (5 comments)

- I am very happy with my child's teacher & curriculum however, I do not know how all pre-primary schools are running. I don't think there should be 4yrs old with 5yrs. It is beneficial only for the younger children.
- Pre-primary classes should not be combined with grade ones. This would put too much pressure on 4-5 yr olds and would not allow sufficient time for grade ones to have the attention they need when commencing primary school.
- My child is currently in a split 4yr/5yr old class. I feel that this has the potential for disadvantages as a % of the 4's are closer to 3 than 4. I feel this increases the workload on teaching staff and decreases their time with the fives. Unfortunately when the 5's have an afternoon where 4's don't attend they lose their teachers aid which I feel counteracts a perfect opportunity for the teaching staff to compensate for the time lost due to distractions and increased supervision needs. I feel 5yr old pre-primary forms the foundations for the transition to yr 1 and that this may be a disadvantage for those 5's struggling with social / academic skills. Fortunately, I do not feel my child will have problems during his transition to yr 1 but feel younger 5's may.

- The 5yo pre-primary program is good in WA. Although it is not very beneficial when a 4yo program is joined and integrated with the 5's as in our centre and is totally disruptive to the 5yo programming to accommodate 4yo concurrently.
- I disagree with having age 4's (some of which are 3) in a pre-primary class. It can disrupt work that the 5 yr olds do & I feel it is also unfair on the teachers / teachers aids.

Communicating to parents (4 comments)

- Not enough information is given to parents about why activities are done, what they are learning & how children learn, & that children learn through playing.
- As this is my first child to enrol in pre-primary I could use more information on how I could assist my child's education at home.
- I would like to have more liaisons with the teacher. Maybe a parent / teacher night per term to catch up on the child's progress. Most 5 yr old children aren't too capable or maybe just not interested in describing the day's events.
- More information as to what will happen and be learnt term to term.

PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS' GENERAL COMMENTS

Formalisation of pre-primary (15 Comments)

- Working in such a large school with 6 pre-primary units, I am finding that we are losing touch with where the children are at and are unfortunately becoming too aware of 'student outcomes' and 'accountability'.
- Yes. The new emphasis on outcomes based education, evaluation & accountability is not terribly compatible with education of PP aged children. I have a high regard for the development of children's positive attitudes to school and self esteem in the pre-primary year. This new approach is pushing me more towards 'teaching to the test' rather than the whole child.
- My program is based on developmental domains and the focus is on play. Child-centred activity is preferred with an emphasis on dramatic play and social interaction. I believe the student outcome statements detract from the developmental domains so as an ECE teacher, I am concerned about the introduction of the Curriculum Framework. This may not allow us to build on what the children already know – the basis of my current programme.
- I would like to see more support with regard to identifying children at risk since we are the first to interact with the children in the school situation, but there is also some anxiety about us becoming too formal TOO EARLY. 'Play' is still the most relevant means of learning for this age group and ALL curriculum areas CAN be integrated into play situations.
- There appears to be increasing pressure from parents in WA desiring a more structured and formal pre-primary program - particularly since the introduction of full-time 5 year old programs. I feel this is unfortunate and inappropriate for many

children born late in the year. Perhaps will be more acceptable when cut off dates for starting pre-primary are introduced.

- It seems many teachers are introducing formal reading / writing programs when they go full day. It seems they don't know what to do with the extra couple of hours. This is a huge concern amongst my professional peers. It demonstrates a lack of knowledge of current research about how children learn & lack of knowledge about children's developmental needs.
- Many teachers of pre-primary children are heading towards a more formalised programme. Using a lot more Year One work. I feel pre-primary children are missing out on basic fine and gross motor skills by getting into work sheets and formal work too soon.
- I feel that many parents are expecting too much formal work from pre-primary – is this because it is full time now? Pre-primary should not be formal, and perhaps Year one could be less formal as well. Children learn through play type activities.
- Expectations of students are increasing unnecessarily. Too formalized in some centres.
- The full day is great – you can cover more, however the children's concentration is lesser in the afternoon. The full day session has become a little formal, due to greater expectations. The focus is therefore less on play.
- It is currently fine, but I am very unhappy with the changes to be brought in eg adjusting the entry age, PP becoming more like grade one, reporting to parents, 5 full days instead of 4 full days for five year olds.
- I don't feel that the programme should become too formalised. I do have my concerns regarding the reporting system to parents.

- Higher profile for pre-primary education in community. EDWA needs to let parents know that PP is not a formal school year but a year for children to develop confidence, social skills & basic reading & writing concepts.
- There is a push to teach children the alphabet and reading and writing and collecting data and testing. There is a risk that programmes are being set-up for the testing instead of the basics.
- I feel with the introduction of full-time 5's and purpose built transportables made specifically for this programme that there is a definite shift away from the basic developmentally appropriate practices of ECE. This will continue as the starting age for school is increased and children begin attending 5 days. Many centres are already running watered down year one programmes.

Expression of dissatisfaction (8 Comments)

- Major emphasis on curriculum areas due to being part of a school, means less emphasis on children's social skills. Children's choices are restricted due to demountable being far too small – restrictions.
- The size of buildings according to numbers of children – and the expectation of the use of these buildings – is something to be concerned about for the future.
- Some consistency across the state regards curriculum is needed. Concern about changes as full-time classes can become regarded as another primary class when it comes to funding. Lack of access to specialist teachers for PP.
- A more defined program is needed to ensure some uniformity throughout WA / Aust. wide schools.
- The pre-primary program offered in WA schools differs from school to school and teacher to teacher. Full time fives should create more similar programs.

- Placing 4 yo in 5 yo centres on non-contact days compromises the PP programme in the fact that no allowance is made for the teacher to set up an appropriate environment to facilitate learning. Classroom sizes & yard sizes decreasing in new schools due to lack of funds in govt schools which creates another set of problems in setting up valuable learning centres/areas for the children.
- It is working well at our school and within the network of teachers I meet. The department are now placing focus on Early Childhood area in their framework however to fully support this they should provide the funding to back up their claims. I would also like to see the department look closer at providing more teachers assistant time in the year 1 classrooms and NOT take away the 2 weeks, ½ days at the beginning of each school year.
- A better support system for children who have problems ie early intervention. More time with Guidance Officer in each school.

Entry age and length of program (5 Comments)

- Have taught full day PP and sessional & feel that the full day PP programme is much easier to teach and I enjoy doing it BUT I feel it is bad value for our education dollar.
- Does this mean satisfaction with the curriculum or with the current structure eg 4 full days for 5 year olds, that is presently in place? Curriculum that is being presented currently is satisfactory. PP children attending 4 full days is acceptable, but PP children attending 5 full days in year 2000 and 4 year olds attending 4, ½ days is not satisfactory for various reasons eg children having to relate to numerous number of adults for DOTT time to be given and maturity of children to cope with 5 full days.

- I am concerned about the trend of full-day pre-primary. More time spent at school doesn't necessarily mean more learnt. The day is too long for many children and negative behaviours occur as a result.
- I am concerned about the reintroduction of 5 full days. I feel this is a cost cutting exercise for the department, NOT a developmental step forward for the children.
- I think 4 full days is plenty. To go back to 5 full days would be a backwards step.

Multi-age grouping (2 Comments)

- A lot of change too quickly & reassessing & changing past decisions. Unsure of the future success, feasibility and difficulties associated with P-1 classes (MAG) – is it going to eventually be questioned & changed – another educational fad?
- The current idea of combining full time five year olds with 4 groups of sessional four year olds is inappropriate. If K's and P's are to be integrated for the purpose of maximisation then use a common timetable – either all full time or all sessional.

The teacher is the key (1 Comment)

- The program offered depends on the implementation by the teacher as to whether it is appropriate for the children.

Expression of satisfaction (1 Comment)

- I feel the full-time pre-primary programme provides us with a better opportunity to provide the children with a developmentally appropriate programme. More time seems to take the pressure off staff and children.

Class sizes (1 Comment)

- Class sizes too large – need reduction.

YEAR ONE TEACHERS' GENERAL COMMENTS

Formalising pre-primary (9 Comments)

- I don't agree with the full time programme as large numbers of children don't need it. Part-time is all they need and the extra money could be used to provide the specialist services needed by some eg speech therapy etc.. I don't agree with the amount of formal learning being done in some centres while the more important socialising is being ignored.
- Tending to go too much into actual learning skills.
- There is a worrying tendency for formal work becoming a focus – ie worksheets. There needs to be more time spent on music, play, drama, listening and motor skill games.
- Over the past two years (since full time pre-primary in our school) I have noticed an increase in some skills but still find some basic areas lacking (not through any fault of the teacher). I feel that fourth term in pre-primary could involve more structured ' sit at desk' type activities to prepare the children for the changes in year one. One of the biggest problems the children seem to have at the beginning of year one is the fact that they must sit at desks and work for longer periods on set activities.
- Full time PP should mean that teachers get more time to work on the same skills NOT to be running a watered down year one programme.
- I am disappointed to see the current trend towards a more formalised education programme eg reading, writing and maths areas. Full time education has not in my opinion been done in the best interests of the child but rather political & parental gain.

- This is my first experience with Year one so my knowledge of the pre-primary program is rather limited. I do find it rather alarming though listening to pre-primary teachers talking that expectations are changing in terms of accountability where work samples are collected and formal reports are being written. Let them develop and learn the necessary social and developmental fine/gross motor skills. Let them be 4 and 5 year olds.
- I am not familiar with the current pre-primary program, as it has changed – but I am concerned that with full time PP students we may introduce formal work too soon.
- I think integration with year 1 is limited. There is little expectation at pre-primary level and too much at year 1 level.

Consistency across programs (2 Comments)

- Standards & expectations between PP units and centres needs to take place, as children are entering Yr 1 with very different skills ie some children haven't been taught or exposed to colours/ shapes/ numbers/ social skills or writing. Similar standards are needed especially with so many children moving between schools.
- Needs to have an expected outcomes / readiness program in place. Children coming to Year 1 from a variety of different PP centres have different skills & knowledge. Need to establish early intervention program for 'at risk' children.

Handwriting (2 Comments)

- Correct pencil grip should be introduced and encouraged if children are writing. Correct letter formations should be shown & encouraged (expected?) when children write names – or in any appropriate learning situation. When introducing alphabet –

do so by NAME and SOUND. Lots of oral and aural activities to heighten awareness.

- If pre-primaries are going to teach letter formations & encourage more writing they should ensure children learn correct pencil grip / formations.

Reporting to parents (1 Comment)

- Parents seem to not be informed when children are experiencing development problems. If there is full time 5 yr old some accountability & reporting to parents seems to be advisable.

The teacher is the key (1 Comment)

- The levels are dependent on the teacher and their beliefs in the teaching / learning program. Some pre-primary children are extended more than others and children need to be developed in order to reach their own potential. They also need skills necessary to 'survive' in the school system.

Multi-age grouping (1 Comment)

- If I wanted to teach pre-primary I would have to retrain. However with MAG I will be allowed to teach pre-primary plus yrs 1 & 2 without a full time aide!

Expression of dissatisfaction (1 Comment)

- As children are supposed to be working at their own level & in the areas of weakness I would expect to see lots of language activities, including some fairly structured situations to develop listening, questioning & descriptive skills. I'm afraid I do not! I see lots of "pretty" visual stuff & decorative displays but the

programmes are sadly lacking in many areas. I do not want any formal lessons like maths, phonics & printing. If they covered language well I would be pleased.